

The Pagoda

TYPE OF CHINESE
ARCHITECTURE



D. J. KAVANAGH, S. J.



THE MARBLE PAGODA

Built in 617 A. D. The hand-carved statues of Buddha and of the warrior-kings are still in an excellent state of preservation.

The Pagoda



BY

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FOREWORD.

It was no easy task to gather together the material out of which the following little sketch has been constructed. Very many authors refer to the Pagoda and speak of its architectural and artistic magnificence, but few, if any,—certainly not one whom I could find,—tell us, with any degree of precision, what Pagodas really are, why they were originally built, or to what uses they were subsequently applied. Brother Beck, S. J., and his associates in the Chinese Orphanage at Zi-ka-wei are, therefore, the pioneers in this particular field of archeological research. To him and to them I am indebted for whatever of scientific value this sketch may possess.

I am fully conscious of its very many imperfections, but it was found necessary to offer some explanation of what, in the opinion of many, is the most interesting exhibit in the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. I shall welcome all suggestions which anyone more conversant with the subject may be kind enough to offer.

REV. D. J. KAVANAGH, S. J.,
Palace of Education, Exposition Grounds,
San Francisco.

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THE PAGODA.

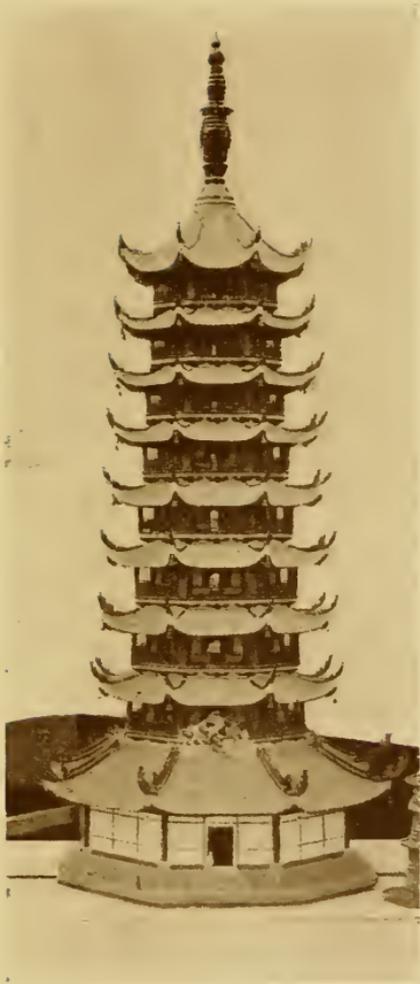
Only a few years ago the eyes of the world were turned, with re-awakened interest, upon the most ancient of nations. Unchanging China, age-old product of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, was in the throes of a revolution, which marked the passing of the Chinese Empire and the birth of the Chinese Republic. With the birth of the Republic was born also a spirit of friendliness toward the outside world. The doors of China, at which for centuries the nations of the West had knocked unheeded, were thrown open and an opportunity was given to study in detail the characteristics of Chinese civilization which had hitherto been manifested in rare and, for the most part, poorly defined glimpses. It had been known, chiefly through the revelation of the missionaries who succeeded at times in penetrating into the very precincts of the Emperor's palace, that, long before the peoples of Western Europe had abandoned their existence as nomad hunters, the Chinese were living in settled communities. It had been known, too, that the Chinese had always shown

a keen interest in everything that was intellectual and artistic and that, while in all the departments of science and art, they had risen to high achievement, in some lines they had never been surpassed. Their art, it is true, is unique, but so is the art of all great peoples. Egypt suggests the pyramids; Babylon, the huge palaces and the hanging gardens; Greece, the Doric and Ionic temples with their noble restraint and exalted beauty; Rome, the triumphal arch, the forum, the amphitheater and the stately villa. The unique characteristic of Chinese art is found symbolized in the Pagoda and it is of the Pagoda that we intend to speak.

I.

RELIGIOUS ORIGIN OF THE PAGODA.

There have been very many theories advanced in an endeavor to explain the origin and the purpose of the Pagodas. Some have argued that, because they are often found near the banks of rivers, streams and canals, they were originally intended to serve as light-houses for the guidance of navigators or as beacon-towers, in time of war, to warn the approach of an enemy. Others have regarded



THE GREAT PAGODA

Built in 1160 A. D., it is the most beautiful in China.

them as monuments erected in honor of great personages or in commemoration of great events. Others again seek their origin in religion, though they are undecided whether the Pagoda was religious merely in the building or intended for subsequent use as a temple or place of worship.

The word itself Pagoda (peh-kuh-t'a) meaning a "white bone tower" offers no key to the solution of the problem. Sometimes, however, perhaps more frequently, it is called a "pao-t'a" and though the literal meaning of the word is "precious tower," there seems to be some suggestion that the building was "precious" not only by reason of its luxuriant ornamentation, but also,—and, in some cases, chiefly—by reason of the "sacred" or "religious" purposes for which it was destined. With the Chinese, "religious," "sacred" and "precious" are almost synonymous terms.

Apart from the name, however, there are other means of determining the original purpose of the Pagoda. In the first place the theories that conflict with the religious character of these towers may very easily be dismissed. The lighthouse theory is puerile. True, the Pagoda is frequently found on the banks of rivers and streams, but the light of recent research has

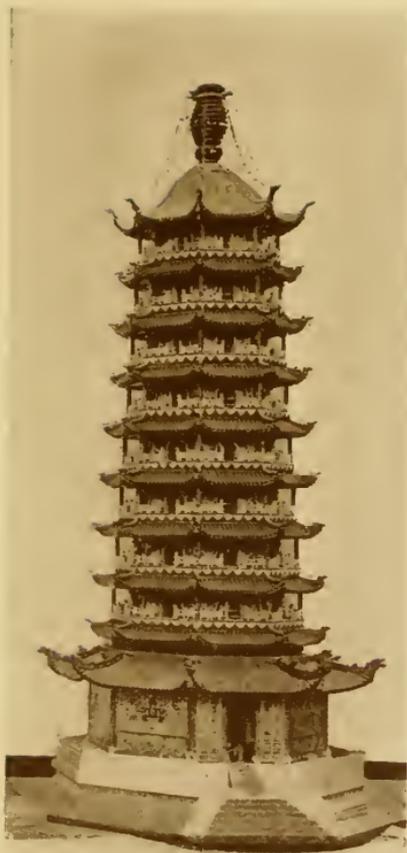


TAMING-FU

Specially noteworthy for its elaborate carvings. The Buddhas in the center panels are nearly 20 feet in height. Their conspicuous presence renders impossible all doubt of the religious character of the Pagodas.

revealed that this is not always the case and that, when it is so, it manifests the appreciative genius of the Chinese builders who invariably chose a site that would lend a natural beauty to their highly embellished structure. What they intended and generally obtained was a blending of art and nature in such a way that the Pagoda seems part of the scenery and the scenery a complement of the Pagoda. That the Pagodas were sometimes used for signaling purposes, both for the benefit of navigators and warriors, no one can deny, but to build such colossal towers, and to ornament them with the luxury of artistic embellishment for these purposes only, was as far from the original plan of the Chinese constructors as to build the Cathedral of Rheims for war-purposes was from the intention of the Medieval French.

The second theory, according to which the Pagoda was a monument erected in honor of great persons or in memory of great events, is not so easily disposed of. It is an admitted fact that, at least, in the period of Chinese history that corresponds to our Middle Ages, some Pagodas were erected for monumental purposes. We are told in Chinese annals that the famous Porcelain Pagoda of Nanking was erected in A. D. 1423 by an emperor of the



THE FAMOUS PORCELAIN PAGODA OF NANKING
Also called the Pagoda of Gratitude. 329 feet in height.

Ming Dynasty in memory of his mother. The native writers also tell us that five precious pearls were placed on the roof. One of these was meant to prevent the terrible inundations caused by the recurrent overflowings of the river Yang-tze, the second to guard against conflagrations, the third to calm high winds, the fourth to check sandstorms, and the fifth, called "The mighty shining pearl," to forestall all attempts made to disturb public peace during the hours of the night.

What is true of this Pagoda at Nanking has been found to be true of other Pagodas as well; but in the first place, the Chinese were careful in such instances to distinguish their memorial towers from the Pagodas properly so called. What is called by outsiders the Pagoda of Nanking is known to the Chinese not as a "Pao-t'a" nor as a "Peh-kuh-t'a," but simply as a "t'a," or tower.

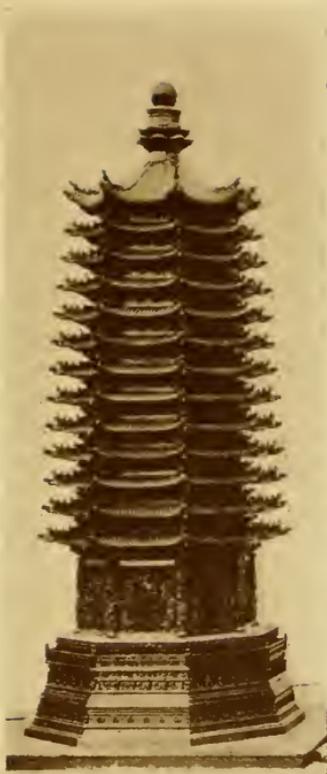
In other instances, where the building is commemorative of ancestors, it is found that the niches are reserved for memorial tablets instead of for the idols that are invariably found in the Pagodas. Moreover the Chinese explicitly distinguish between the "Pao-t'a" or sacred tower and the "Toov-tang" or what we should call a "hall of fame."

But even apart from this clearly defined distinction between the sacred and the secular edifice, and the further consideration that the "t'a" is of recent date, it would be quite possible to admit the memorial character of the Pagoda and to maintain, at the same time, that it is none the less religious. The reason is obvious to all who know that one of the predominant traits of all of the Oriental religions is the worship of ancestors. It makes very little difference whether the ancestors are far removed in point of time or but recently departed, the honor paid to them is a part of the religion of China and even if the Pagoda originated in this idea alone it would come under the general heading of a religious temple.

Still more conclusive arguments of the religious origin of the Pagoda are available. When in the year 65 A. D. at the express invitation of the Emperor Ming-Ti, the Hindoo Bonzes introduced Buddhism into the Celestial Empire, it was but natural that with the religion they should bring its outward forms and expressions and among these outward forms, the Hindoo "Gopura" or tower-temple was not the least. There is, it is true, an architectural difference between the "Gopura" and the "Pagoda," but the difference seems to consist chiefly

in this, that the latter is an exaggerated embellishment of the former. The Buddhist origin of the Pagoda is beyond all question an established fact. The "All-Precious Pagoda" of Chi-li, for instance, is literally covered with images and paintings of Buddha, while there is scarcely a single Pagoda in the whole extent of China that has not several such images.

If it be argued against this conclusion that some of the Pagodas are doorless and that therefore it is impossible to regard them as temples of worship, the answer is not far to seek. This is true of very few, and though in such cases there can be no question of "a temple," there is ample proof that the religious motive was not wanting. It was held by the Chinese that the very building of such a monument was an act of religion, sufficient to establish the claim of the builder to "merit." Hence it sometimes happened that the building once completed, was forthwith abandoned and neglected. The builder had gained his "merit" and others had no reason to interfere in what had already been accomplished. It is for this reason that the material of construction was often perishable. There is not, at the present day, a single Pagoda in a state of perfect preservation. Most of them are either rapidly



YUENPING-HSIEN

A masterpiece of 14th century architecture. The carvings show remarkable skill and artistic taste. The warrior-kings that surround the second story have been faithfully reproduced in actual size by the Zi-ka-wei orphans. Six of these reproduced statues may be seen at the Exposition.

disintegrating or already in utter ruin. This fact, that the Pagoda was, at times, abandoned to the destructive elements, merely indicates that though the religious idea was always present, it was not always present in the same way. Sometimes the purpose was to construct a temple; at other times to make an offering to the Chinese deities.

There were many religious and semi-religious legends connected with the Pagodas. It was said of the "Flowery Pagoda" of Kwangchow-fu that if ever its vane were to fall, evil would come upon the city, and it is told in Chinese annals that when, on two occasions, the vane did fall, evil times resulted as a punishment for the neglect of an irreligious people.

Add to these considerations the particular names by which the Pagodas were originally known,—most of them religious in character, as "The Heaven Conferred," "The Celestial Rest," etc.,—add moreover the undeniable fact that though some were isolated, most of them were in the court-yards of the Buddhist monasteries, and there can be no doubt that, whatever the occasional uses might have been, the original idea of the Chinese builders was entirely religious in character.

II.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES OF THE
PAGODAS.

What strikes the Western visitor on first entering China is the dominance of the roof in all their architecture and especially in the Pagoda. It is this feature more than any other which renders their buildings so novel and gives them their chief claim to beauty of form. Next to the quaintness of these roofs, the number, the variety, and the beauty of the Pagodas attract one's attention. One finds them all over the Republic, in the walled cities, in the small towns, in country districts, and even in the remote uplands of Tibet, but they are generally in or near cities or on the banks of rivers and streams.

They are graceful, highly ornamented towers,



The West Wood
Pagoda

One of the oldest in China, an admirable example of the prevailing type of roof.

consisting of seven, nine, thirteen, or sometimes more stories. Each story is surmounted by a tiled roof with the characteristic Chinese upturned corners. A peculiarity about the number of stories is that it is always odd. The Pagoda of Tai-li-fu, with its sixteen stories, is the only exception.

They are generally octagonal in shape, though some are square, others hexagonal and at least one round Pagoda is known at K'wangchoo-fu in the province of Kwantung. All Pagodas diminish in the height and width of their stories as they ascend. Thus their builders secured for them graceful tapering proportions, saving the small ones from being squat and stubby, and the lofty ones from appearing suddenly truncated. The tiles of the roof which surround the stories are highly colored, usually in green. They are almost invariably built of brick, with a facing of stone. At Yengchow-fu in the Province of Shan-tung, there is a Pagoda built of iron and at Nanking in the Province of Kiangsu there is one built entirely of marble. Though erected in A. D. 617 the Marble Pagoda is one of the most graceful and one of the most beautiful both in design and in ornamentation. It has five stories and is only sixty feet in height; but it is covered from

base to summit with most wonderful carvings, all in a very good state of preservation. More than a thousand years later in the reign of K'anglisi (A. D. 1662-1723), the white Jade Pagoda was erected in Peking. It resembles the Marble Pagoda of Nanking in being rather small, only 75 feet in height. It also is covered from base to summit with most elaborate carvings and is equally beautiful in design. Previous to the revolution of the long-haired rebels in 1853 there was at Nanking the famous "Porcelain Tower." It was octagonal, with nine stories and three hundred and twenty-nine feet in height. On account of its beauty of form and elaborate ornamentation it was for centuries one of the wonders of the East; but this did not save it from the vandalism of the rebels who captured the city in 1853 and razed the beautiful Pagoda to the ground in 1856.

Nearly all of these Oriental towers have two walls. They may be said to be towers within



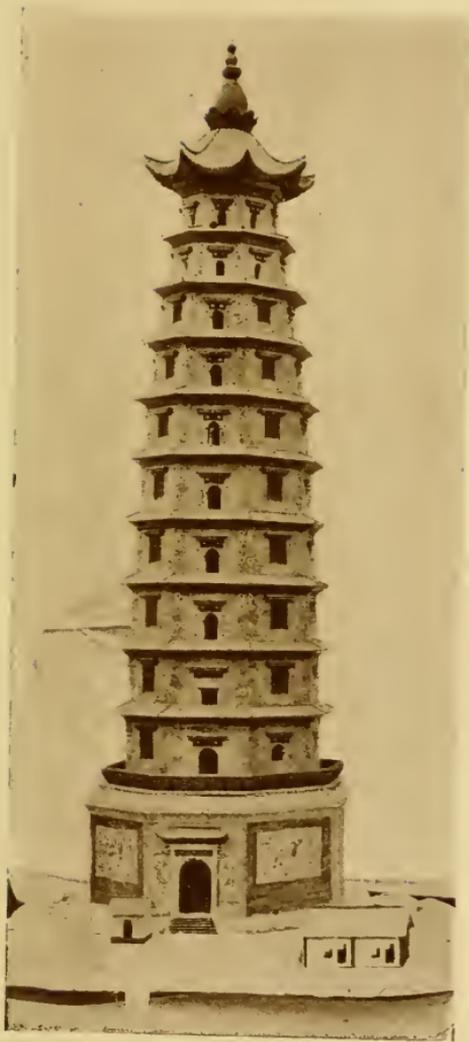
A Typical Square
Pagoda

towers. The spiral staircase which passes from story to story is placed between the outer and inner walls, each of which may be six or seven feet in thickness. A striking peculiarity about some of the Pagodas is that they are noticeably out of plumb; some even are genuine leaning towers, reminding one of the Tower of Pisa.

III.

THE RESTORATION OF THE PAGODA.

Archeological students are for the most part satisfied when their research-work has been pushed so far as to enable them to outline on paper or in imagination, the original proportions of some crumbling monument of antiquity. When we hear of the Roman Forum "Restored," we think of a picture with complete details of temples, of arches, of via sacra and of toga-clad Romans hurrying to and fro amid the monumental structures. Such an achievement is worthy of the archeologist, but it is not the most perfect form of restoration. If, instead of the picture, you could see, in miniature, all the primitive buildings, the fluted columns, the massive arches, the relief work faithfully reproduced in even the minutest detail, the statues that adorned the buildings, the tri-



THE OUTLOOK PAGODA
360 feet in height, repaired by Wanlih in the 16th century.

pods for the incense-offerings, the altars of sacrifice, all arranged in their proper relations of size, of distance and of height, you would have more opportunity to study the original grandeur just as it was.

It is precisely this form of restoration or, more properly speaking, reproduction, that has resulted from years of painstaking research among the ruins of China's many Pagodas. Brother Beck, S. J., the director of the wood-carving establishment at Zi-ka-wei, was not content with a mere outline on paper of Chinese architecture; he set himself the task of reproducing in exact detail all of the famous Pagodas.

The task was gigantic, not only by reason of the work which it entailed, and the expenses that would naturally have to be incurred, but also, and chiefly, because he was a pioneer in the field. Others had studied and admired the Pagodas of the sea-board provinces, some had secured photographs of their present-day disintegration and not a few had written about their origin and the different purposes for which they had often been used; but no one had taken up the subject in its entirety until, a few years ago, Brother Beck of Zi-ka-wei, began his monumental work.

He was admirably equipped for the task. Besides the encouragement received from the Chinese Government authorities, who deeply appreciated the idea of restoration, and the freedom he had in consulting historical documents and national archives, the Jesuit Brother had the exceptional advantage of being in direct communication with his fellow missionaries in the different provinces of the Republic. Detailed information was sent to him from all parts of China, descriptions and photographs of every Pagoda as it stands today were secured, historical data were sifted and the result was a clearer knowledge and a wider information than any previously obtained.

Nor was this all. The information, though valuable, served only as the first step in his study. He conceived the idea of actually "re-building" all the famous Pagodas of China and in this, too, he was at a distinct advantage; he had under his direction about three hundred orphan-boys, trained in artistic and mechanical trades, skilled wood-carvers, painters, decorators, carpenters, and above all, willing workers. The orphans of Zi-ka-wei, appreciative of and grateful for the care which they have received from their Jesuit benefactors, are docile and quick to learn and willing to work.

Supplied with the information, with the material and with the builders, Brother Beck began his work and has succeeded in "rebuilding" eighty-two of China's wonderfully artistic Pagodas, of rebuilding them with an exactness in every detail that has compelled the admiration of students of Chinese art and architecture throughout the world.

We shall mention but a few of the special features of Brother Beck's work. The "Marble Pagoda" of Nanking, "Si-hia shan Ku ta," as it is called in Chinese, was built in 617 A. D. and its stone-carved images are marvels of primitive Chinese art. Statues of Buddha and of warrior-kings of heroic dimensions, storied panels and bas-reliefs, borders and friezes and cornices, every inch of which is an elaboration of microscopic detail-work, unite to make this monument, which, after the lapse of fourteen centuries, is in a very good state of preservation, the most interesting in the whole range of Chinese archeology. Brother Beck's model, though necessarily in miniature, has reproduced every feature, from the colossal statues of warrior-kings down to the smallest detail in the wonderfully labyrinthian panels.

Another interesting Pagoda is the Buddhist Stupa, with its 1000 idols. It is nine stories in



JEH-HO-TA

A Pagoda of the Tsing Dynasty. Height 213 feet.

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height and of exceptionally beautiful lines. The gracefully curved gables terminate in hanging bells, fifty-six in number, the balconies or porches that surround the Pagoda at intervals



The Buddhist Stupa

The Pagoda of 1000 Idols. Every one of these idols has been faithfully reproduced by the orphans of Zi-ka-wel.

are tastefully executed. Built in the seventeenth century, it is one of the few religious monuments of the Manchu dynasty; but though comparatively recent, it is none the less artistic. In fact, with the possible exception of the "Great Pagoda" of Soochow-fu, and the "Porcelain Tower,"—the "Pagoda of Gratitude" of Nanking,—it is the most beautiful and the most graceful in China. Wonderful, however, as the original structure was, the model reproduced by Brother Beck's orphan boys is easily conceded to be a greater achievement. All of

the 1,000 idols are carved, in miniature, of course, but with microscopic exactness. The little reproduced bells hang gracefully from the upturned roofs, the balconies are carved with

precision and fidelity to every, even the smallest, detail.

The limits of this sketch prevent a further explanation of the work of reconstruction accomplished by the Zi-ka-wei orphans. Those who are interested in the achievement may visit the exhibit of eighty-two Pagodas in the Palace of Education of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. There they will have an opportunity to see, for themselves, the nature of the work accomplished. Many, it is true, will not appreciate to the full, the scientific value of the collection and the enormous work which it implies, but no one can fail to admire, in a general way, both the architectural skill of the original Chinese builders and the painstaking and laborious reconstructive work of the orphans of Zi-ka-wei.

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