

Fo Guang Shan
International Translation Center

Building Connections: Buddhism & Architecture

Buddhism in Every Step C5
（英文版）

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Table of Contents

I.	**Architecture as Insight into Culture**	**1**
II.	**The History and Value of Buddhist Architecture**	**6**
III.	**The Future Direction of Buddhist Architecture: Building a Modern Temple**	**16**

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I. Architecture as Insight into Culture

Architecture is an art of profound creativity. The world-renowned Forbidden City and Dunhuang Caves in China, the Ajanta Caves and the Taj Mahal in India, the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Louvre in France, and the impressive Greek Parthenon are architectural masterpieces that represent some of the world's greatest artistic accomplishments. Often, the design and intention of a structure dictate the art surrounding it and contained within it. Therefore, we frequently find equally impressive paintings, sculptures, and landscaping throughout an architectural creation. One might say, therefore, that architecture is the "mother of art."

Architecture is a visual representation of culture. Through architecture, one can understand a

certain culture's environment, climate, societal priorities, characteristics of the people, dynamics of human interaction, customs, religions, and living habits, as well as the relationships among these qualities. For example, the people of ancient Egypt valued eternal life, and many people devoted their entire lives to building a place for their spirit after death. Therefore, the art form of the pyramids, which functioned as elaborate tombs, was born. In China, as rival warlords strove for supremacy from generation to generation, internal revolts and foreign invasions were perpetual. In response to the continuous threat of danger, the Great Wall was built. Protective moats were constructed at the outskirts of certain cities to prevent potential invaders from entering. In countries such as Greece, Italy, and Spain, rooftops are built at steep, sloping angles to prevent them from collapsing under the weight of heavy snow and rain. In an area like Egypt, where very little rain falls, flat roofs are popular.

In China, where the territory is quite expansive, northern architecture and southern architecture have their own unique features. In the chilly north, where the cold weather can be quite bitter, the stove bed has become an architectural necessity. In the comfortable south, where the

weather is much warmer, the general architecture includes open pavilions, terraces, towers, and flower gardens with paths. Flowers and trees are commonly planted to provide the comfort of shade and fresh air. A traditional feature in both regions is the horizontal style of architecture, where buildings and homes sprawl over rather large pieces of land. This is very different than most western architecture, which tends to be developed vertically in order to save space.

Chinese people are proud of their architectural accomplishments. The Great Wall is often called "The World's Miracle." It is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The majestic tomb of the Qin dynasty is honored with the title of "one of the greatest ancient relics."The Dunhuang Caves, with their innumerable artistic treasures, are considered a "museum on the walls." The Altar of Heaven, where emperors go to pay respect to heavenly beings and ancestors, is viewed as "one of the world's supreme architectural masterpieces."

One aspect of Chinese culture that can give us a clue as to why the country has seen so many incredible architectural feats is the tradition of emperors who constructed massive new buildings once they came into power. Each dynasty established its command in the area it presided

over by building a new imperial center, such as the Forbidden City of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Chinese culture often uses architecture to preserve a historical legend or to commemorate ancestry, a specific event, or a particular person, especially an emperor. The Qin dynasty's Epang Palace, which is the tomb for this dynasty's first emperor, is one such example. In this manner, architecture serves to record history.

Architecture and people's livelihoods within a society are very closely connected. Basic necessities, such as food, clothing, accommodation, and transportation, all dictate the construction of appropriate structures and thus are intrinsically related. Residential buildings, bridges, and canals are erected to provide the daily necessities of shelter and transportation. Similarly, if no factories are built, how can clothes, food, and other daily requirements be produced? How we meet the demands of daily living is highly dependent on architectural achievements.

Architecture provides a witness to the impressions of our ancestors. With techniques always changing and growing through accumulated experience and innovative ideas, history can be traced through advancements in architecture. From living in a tree and creating a home in a cave in the early days, to today's elaborate

houses and high-rise buildings, architecture reflects the development of civilization. It is a testimony to the great changes that have taken place in history. Architecture has also recorded the movement of every generation. It serves as the visual memory for the history of our ancestors, the conditions they lived in, and the cultural changes they lived through.

The religious beliefs and spiritual traditions of a culture cannot be separated from architecture. For example, much Chinese architecture includes Buddhist temples, Buddhist stupas, serene gardens, rock caves, and so forth. Many structures in China are somehow connected to religion, primarily Buddhism. Therefore, Buddhism plays a very important role in the architectural field.

International Buddhist Publication

II. The History and Value of Buddhist Architecture

A. The Birth of Buddhist Architecture

Buddhism is a religion that honors nature. Most Buddhist practitioners seek to transcend worldly, material desires and try to develop a close kinship with nature. Especially during the time of the Buddha, disciples often lived in very simple and crude thatched houses and were able to develop and maintain a peaceful and joyful mind.Whether dwelling in a suburban area, a forest, by the waterside, in a freezing cave, or under a tree, they were always comfortable with their living situation. However, as Buddhist disciples grew in number, King Bimbisara and a follower named Sudatta proposed that a monastery be built that would allow practitioners to gather in a common place and practice in a more organized manner. After the Buddha deeply considered and then wholeheartedly agreed with this idea, he allowed devotees to make donations of monasteries. As a result, the Jetavana Monastery, the Bamboo Grove Monastery, and the Mrgaramatr-prasada Lecture Hall were constructed. This was the beginning of Buddhist architecture in India.

In China, in 67 CE, there was a debate between some Daoists and two Buddhist monks from India named Ksayapamatanga and Gobharana. Due to this lively dialogue, the emperor's interest and belief in Buddhism was ignited. Although Daoism was quite popular at this time, the emperor accepted and honored Buddhism, ordering the construction of a monastery outside the city for bhiksus and a monastery inside the city for bhiksunis. This was the birth of Chinese Buddhist architecture.

B. Types and Styles of Buddhist Architecture

Buddhist temples are often the center of cultural activities. From a modern viewpoint, temples can be compared to museums, for they contain precious and spectacular art forms and, in fact, are beautiful art forms themselves. Like art museums, they are a combination of architecture, sculpture, painting, and calligraphy. Temples offer a harmonized environment and a spiritual atmosphere that allows one to become serene and tranquil. They are valuable places for distressed persons to lay down their burdens, soothe their minds, and achieve a sense of calm.

In early China, stupas were the main architectural structures being built. It was not until

the Sui and Tang dynasties that the hall, or shrine, became the focus. A stupa, sometimes referred to as a pagoda, can be considered the "high rise" of Buddhist architecture due to its tall, narrow shape that reaches toward the sky–sometimes to an immense height. The concept and form of the Chinese stupa originated in India. The purpose of a stupa is to provide a place to enshrine the Buddha's relics, where people can then come and make offerings to the Buddha. Beginning with a relatively simple style, the stupa has been transformed in China, with improvements and innovations that demonstrate the country's artistic and architectural abilities. While maintaining a relatively consistent shape, stupas are constructed in a variety of sizes, proportions, colors, and creative designs. Although you can find stupas by waterfronts, in the cities, in the mountains, or in the country, they are all constructed to harmonize with and beautify the environment. The stupa is indeed one of the most popular types of architecture in China.

The Buddhist architecture of every region has its own unique character due to differing cultural and environmental factors. Ceylon's architecture is similar to India's architecture. Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia also

share a similar style, with structures that incorporate the use of wood into their design. Java's stupas resemble those of Tibet, which are made of stone and represent the nine-layered mandala. Tibet's large monasteries are typically constructed on hillsides and are similar in style to European architecture in which the buildings are connected to each other, forming a type of street-style arrangement.

Buddhist temples in China are commonly built in the emperor's palace style and are, therefore, categorized as "palace architecture." This layout is designed with symmetry in mind, with the main gate and main hall in the center and other facilities–including the celestial beings hall, the lecture hall, the patriarch hall, and the abbot's quarters–lined up on either side. On one side, a ceremonial drum is placed and, on the other, a ceremonial bell. Behind this symmetrical line of structures is a guesthouse for lay visitors and the Yun Shui Hall for visiting monastics to reside in during their stay.

The materials used in constructing the temples and associated facilities include wood and tile, with the roof tiles painted a certain color. Because wood is a difficult material to preserve over long periods of time, China has very few palace-style temples that have survived from

the early ages. We are fortunate, however, that Fo Guang Temple, built out of wood during the Tang dynasty, still stands. The main palace-style hall of Fo Guang Temple is still relatively pristine in appearance and sturdiness and gives us a sense of the grandeur of this time. The exquisite art of the Tang dynasty, including sculpture, paintings, and murals, is still displayed today in this surviving temple and allows us to understand that this era was China's high point in artistic expression. This temple became a national treasure and reminds us of China's golden age of art and architecture.

Fo Guang Temple and the other temples that have endured the passage of time–although there are not very many–reveal how structures, decoration, and construction methods have evolved over different eras. They also serve as a visual, material memory of a certain age and area, helping us to study the region's architectural and cultural history. However, as mentioned above, despite the fact that China has 5,000 years of history, preserved architecture is very limited. It is not simply the use of wood, which is highly susceptible to fire and decay, that prevents us from having more standing temples from the early ages to study today. Other reasons exist for the rarity of remaining

temples. For instance, around the 16th century, some dynasties that rose to power ordered the demolition of the previous dynasty's major architectural structures. Some temples were damaged or even destroyed in various bouts of war and aggression. Regardless of the materials used in construction–wood, stone, clay, etc.–it was nearly impossible for an abundance of temples to survive due to human rivalry. Fortunately, Buddhist cave temples, which will be discussed in detail in the next section, are relatively immune to weather destruction, and for the most part they also escaped human desecration. They are well preserved and make it possible to see traditional architecture and ancient art.

Modern Buddhist temples often imitate ancient architecture. For example, the design of the main shrines of Taiwan's Fo Guang Shan, the United States' Hsi Lai Temple, and Australia's Nan Tien Temple are all based on Chinese architecture from the early ages. Many Buddhist temples today not only honor and preserve Chinese culture, they have introduced and spread Chinese culture around the globe.

C. Cave Temples

In the history of Chinese Buddhist art and architecture, the most important link is the rock cave, or cave temple, and all of the art contained within it. Cave temples are cavities of various sizes that are chiseled directly out of solid rock, sometimes directly on the face of sheer cliffs. Many are quite enormous. Within the rock caves, there are ornately carved statues, sculptures, and colorful paintings of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, arhats, and sutras. This artistic practice was started in 366 CE by a monastic named Lezun and continued until the 15th century. In some places, entire mountainsides are decorated with innumerable cave temples and gigantic carved statues. Among these countless cave temples, the Dunhuang Caves are the most famous for their impressive and grandiose murals. Other well-known caves in China include the Longmen Caves in Luoyang, the Yungang Caves in Datong, and the Thousand Buddhas Caves in Jinang. The Yungang Caves are especially well known for their grand size.

The creation of cave temples occurred over thousands of years, spanning several dynasties, and, unlike wooden temples that suffer dilapidation from the elements, are sheltered by massive

rock and, therefore, remain standing as remarkable and majestic testimonials to Buddhism flourishing throughout China. The magnificence and grandeur of Buddhist art within the caves has awed the world and captured the essence and detail of the teachings for all visitors to behold. In the eyes of artists and archaeologists, this type of Buddhist architecture is especially full of life, beauty, and evidence of the transformation and evolution of Buddhist art throughout history. They are treasures that hold an important place in China's cultural, artistic, and architectural history.

D. The Role and Function of Buddhist Temples

In a temple, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, the Triple Gem, exist together in harmony and joy. The temple is a gathering place where followers can go to make offerings to the Buddha and learn the Buddha's precious teachings. While the temple is the grandest representation of Buddhism and a place for believers to expand their own hearts and minds, it is also the starting point for spreading the teachings and practicing compassion outside the temple walls in order to help even more people. As Buddhism gains momentum in the world, Buddhist practice

will become less and less confined within temple boundaries. Though Buddhism will continue to extend beyond temple grounds and become increasingly alive in the world, the temple will always remain an important symbol for practitioners. If there is a temple, there will always be a place where Buddhism can thrive, and the living Dharma will continue to be taught in our world.

Temples not only provide the teachings of the Buddha; they offer a noble and dignified atmosphere, peaceful chanting, and serene places to meditate and calm the mind for people who face long days of hard work or are struggling with problems in their lives. Upon arriving at a temple, the stunning beauty and calming sounds can purify people's minds and give them inspiration to meet life's daily challenges. When people encounter distress and helplessness, the temple is an ideal place to seek relief and inner nourishment. Whether they join a specific activity, come only to pay respect, or simply sit down and enjoy a moment of quiet in the soothing atmosphere, they can rejuvenate their energy and will to go forward and face the world. The temple can be called a filling station for energy or a department store for life, where one can find many different services in a single place.

Temples may also be compared to schools, where one can gain knowledge and learn the Buddha's teachings. Because sound principles are both modeled and taught in temples, visiting a temple encourages people to act morally and with more self-awareness. This results in a more stable and harmonious society. Temples are also places where followers can meet new people and form a circle of support and friendship grounded in a common interest in Buddhism.

Temples are not only places of relief and respite for Buddhist practitioners but also for people of different backgrounds and faiths. Especially in the past, when temples were constructed in secluded forests, high mountains, and lakesides far from the heart of the city, temples attracted all sorts of people, even from very distant cities. Though the journey was not always convenient or quick, people were eager to get away from the noisy, fast pace of the city to enjoy the splendid and peaceful environment the temples provided. People of many different beliefs and lifestyles enjoyed the happiness and tranquility of nature through visiting temples tucked away in remote places.

III. The Future Direction of Buddhist Architecture: Building a Modern Temple

Buddhist temple architecture of the past can be roughly divided into two main components: the monastery and the living area. The monastery had a dual purpose. The first was to give people opportunities to make offerings to the Buddha and to the bodhisattvas. This opportunity occurred in the Main Hall, Maitreya Bodhisattva Hall, Medicine Buddha Hall, Guanyin Bodhisattva Hall, and Patriarch Hall, all of which were considered a part of the monastery. The second purpose of the monastery was to offer lay followers and monastics a place to gather and practice. This part of the monastery included the Meditation Hall, the Chanting Hall, and the Yun Shui Hall. The second main architectural feature was the living area, which included the dining hall, kitchen, guest hall, residential quarters for monastics, nursing home, and reception area.

Today, the architecture of Buddhist temples has not and should not remain confined only to the facilities mentioned above. As technology advances over time, the methods of propagating the Dharma should also be continually improved, with additional features and facilities created for this purpose. The design and layout of Buddhist

temple architecture should be modernized in order to spread the Dharma in new ways that are appropriate to the current age. Modern temples must emphasize and address:

1. The efficient use of space.
2. Coordination between all programs, activities, and events so that they can operate without interfering with each other.
3. The proper location for all services offered.
4. Humanitarian design that considers the special needs of people and makes all services accessible to everyone.
5. Reasonable zoning that specifies clear areas of use and separates the monastic living quarters from day-to-day activities.
6. A thorough consideration for safety.

In Taiwan, Fo Guang Shan has activated new programs and facilities that take into consideration the needs of contemporary practitioners and that incorporate the six elements mentioned above. In addition to the architectural features listed in the description of the monastery and the living area, Fo Guang Shan offers a large

conference room, a lecture hall, a repentance hall, a sutra-writing hall, an auditorium, a tea-room, a gift shop, and a spacious parking lot. The overall temple design is planned so that the facilities embody and advocate the spirit of the four bodhisattvas. The architectural structure is also an imitation of the four famous mountains of Mainland China, where followers have gone on pilgrimages for many years, believing that the bodhisattvas manifest themselves there. There is the Great Compassion Hall for Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, the Great Wisdom Hall for Manjusri Bodhisattva, the Great Vow Hall for Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, and the Great Practice Hall for Samantabhadra Bodhisattva.

Fo Guang Shan seeks to be a place that everyone can use and where everyone can gain knowledge, find spiritual guidance, and receive various forms of assistance. While developing new facilities, Fo Guang Shan keeps four core components in mind: culture, education, the propagation of the Dharma, and compassion. As for the cultural aspect, the temple has a museum of cultural artifacts, an art museum, and a special exhibition hall. To fulfill the education and Dharma propagation aspects, Fo Guang Shan has a Buddhist college and several education halls for monks, nuns, and lay followers that are

complete with all of the necessary materials and features that enable this important learning to take place. For the element of compassion, the temple has many programs and services that benefit and improve the social welfare of people who have diverse needs in various stages of life. These include the Buddha's Light Retirement Home, the Daci Children's Home, the Longevity Memorial Park, the Fo Guang Clinic, and a mobile hospital unit that gives medical attention to people in remote areas. These and other facilities at Fo Guang Shan provide comfort, care, and specific services for all stages of life, from birth to death.

From the architectural features mentioned above, we know that Fo Guang Shan is a modern, versatile, and multifunctional monastery. It is a temple that has responded to the needs of people and society. In the past, most temples were erected in remote areas, far away from the pulse of society. Although they frequented temples, it was often difficult or inconvenient for city dwelling people to undertake the lengthy journey involved in visiting a temple. As life and its accompanying challenges gradually changed, temples were more frequently built in cities in order to be more easily accessible to those seeking help and refuge. In modern society, temples

are no longer places just for monks and nuns; they exist for everyone. Another transformation is that temples no longer always adhere to the traditional style of architecture but can now be found in today's high-rise buildings. In Taiwan, many temples are entered by going up in an elevator of an office building and emerging onto a floor that has been renovated into a beautiful, serene haven, replete with all the features of a more conventional temple.

The objective for future temples is to have people engaged in the varied programs and opportunities available to them, including studying in the school, gaining knowledge in the lecture room, sharing ideas in the conference room, and much more. The goal is to have people move beyond a superficial level of faith. Therefore, future developments in temple architecture should allow temples to play a more significant role in people's social, intellectual, and spiritual development. To accomplish this, the modern temple should be:

1. A place that belongs to everyone.
2. A school that offers quality education.
3. A conference center that is conducive to open communication and the sharing of ideas.

4. A community center where people can freely interact and develop supportive friendships.

The modernization of Buddhist architecture isn't for the purpose of being fanciful or for winning the favor of the public. The ongoing additions and transformations embody the Buddha's compassion and great vow to save all sentient beings. With wisdom and loving-kindness, the Buddha altered the method of his teachings to match the special needs of the audience or the person he was addressing. In the same way, the changes in temple architecture attempt to offer the most convenient and appropriate facilities that comply with the unique needs of every era. The larger purpose behind improving temple architecture is improving people's spiritual lives, and as a result, improving the world as a whole. Based on the ruins of ancient temples that were excavated in India, it is evident that even in the early ages, temples were quite progressive for the time. These ancient temples appeared to have well-designed sanitation areas, sophisticated ventilation systems, and overall structures that could be regarded as highly advanced for the era.

Today, Buddhism tries to popularize the spirit of the Buddha by following this same line of thinking, using ingenious methods and innovative ideas in its architecture in order to keep up with the times. Temples have expanded from the mountains to urban centers, from a passive and self-centered focus to actively benefiting others, and from offering very few services to being completely accommodating to the needs of a diverse population. While not compromising any of the original teachings, Buddhism adjusts and adapts to every era. In this manner, regardless of the day and age, temples can serve as places of spiritual refuge and guidance for everyone.

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