

Standard Architecture in a Multi-centered, Multi-cultural Age

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The three-year period, 963-966, is unique in the history of pre-Ming Chinese architecture. Three dated wooden buildings survive in three provinces from three different kingdoms. The earliest, Ten Thousand Buddhas Hall at Zhengguosi in Haodong, Shanxi, built under Northern Han (951-979) rule, was constructed in 963. The following year, 964, Daxiongbao Hall was constructed in Fuzhou, Fujian province, during rule of the Wuyue kingdom (907-978). Then in 966, Wenshu Hall was built in Laiyuan country, Hebei. It survives as the earliest wooden example of Liao (947-1125) architecture.

The paper begins with a look at the timber frames of these three buildings, to ask if they share building components, elements that might lead to a structural definition of the mid-10th century in Chinese architecture. The conclusion will be that in superficial ways they are similar, but in details, remarkably different. Yet the superficial similarities, it will be shown, are significant: they are the features that define Chinese architecture as “Chinese.”

Where both the similar and distinctive features come from and what they mean are explored in the rest of the paper. Certainly Tang wooden architecture would be expected to be a source. It is, but only in the superficial, or obvious, way that I will have suggested as a means of viewing the three buildings of the 960s as similar, features such as the employment of three interlocking timber layers: columns, bracketing, and roof frame. The details, particularly bracket sets, are distinctive. So are the beams.

To understand wooden architecture of the period more deeply, the paper then turns to other dated buildings of the 10th century. Like the four extant Tang wooden buildings, most of the 10th buildings are in Shanxi. The two that post-date Tang and pre-date the 960s are the West Side Hall of Longmen Monastery in Pingshun county, dated 925, and Great Buddha Hall of Dayun Monastery, also in Pingshun, dated 940. If one includes all the other standing 10th century buildings in China, the Middle Hall of Chongming Monastery in Gaoping, dated 968-977, the Hall of the Divine Kings and Middle Hall of North Jixiang Monastery in Lingchuan, are believed to date to 978, and the Front Hall of Youxiansinear Gaoping is dated 990-995. More spectacular 10th century architecture survives in Hebei, Dabei Pavilion and Cishi Pavilion at Longxing Monastery in Zhengding are associated with the year 971 and the Guanyin Pavilion and gate in front of it at Dule Monastery date to 984. These last two monasteries were constructed under Song and Liao patronage, respectively.

In discussion of the China's fourteen building with established dates from the late eighth through the tenth century, identifying features will be noted. A fundamental distinction, rank and associated structural components, will also be explained, and this aspect of the paper will provide an opportunity to talk about the relation between architectural manuals such as *Yingzao fashi* (Building standards) and building.

Yet the questions the paper seeks to answer are if Chinese wooden buildings, all of which are Buddhist or Daoist, offer evidence of the multicentric world of the first two-thirds of the 10th century, and what this might mean. The first three buildings, associated with three short-lived kingdoms, in three separate regions of China, provide a few details that I will suggest might be related to the aspirations of their various patrons. But the

groups of fourteen suggest a different understanding of 10th century China, one that is, it will be argued, is mult centered and multicultural, but not in its architecture.

In trying to explain why the building tradition shows so little evidence of the world around it, I shall first demonstrate that the pervasive image of a wooden religious building is as powerfully standard as 10th century pagoda and tomb construction. I shall conclude by showing China to have long been multicultural, and that even in periods of profound multicentricity, such as the 3rd – 6th centuries, Chinese architecture was remarkably untouched by the world around it.