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# CHINA'S EARLY MOSQUES

NANCY SHATZMAN STEINHARDT

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MOSQUES

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University Press

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Edinburgh University Press Ltd  
The Tun – Holyrood Road  
12 (2f) Jackson's Entry  
Edinburgh EH8 8PJ

First published in hardback by Edinburgh University Press 2015

Typeset in 10/12 pt Trump Mediaeval by  
Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire,  
and printed and bound by Printforce

A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 7486 7041 3 (hardback)  
ISBN 978 1 4744 3721 9 (paperback)

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Published with the support of the University of Edinburgh Scholarly Publishing Initiatives Fund.

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## Series Editor's Foreword

'Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Art' is a new venture that offers readers easy access to the most up-to-date research across the whole range of Islamic art. Building on the long and distinguished tradition of Edinburgh University Press in publishing books on the Islamic world, it is intended to be a forum for studies that, while closely focused, also open wide horizons. Books in the series will, for example, concentrate in an accessible way on the art of a single century, dynasty or geographical area; on the meaning of works of art; on a given medium in a restricted time frame; or on analyses of key works in their wider contexts. A balance will be maintained as far as possible between successive titles, so that various parts of the Islamic world and various media and approaches are represented.

Books in the series are academic monographs of intellectual distinction that mark a significant advance in the field. While they are naturally aimed at an advanced and graduate academic audience, a complementary target readership is the worldwide community of specialists in Islamic art – professionals who work in universities, research institutes, auction houses and museums – as well as that elusive character, the interested general reader.

*Professor Robert Hillenbrand*

## Preface

The first mosque I entered was in Taipei in 1976. In Taiwan to study both Chinese language and Chinese architecture, I was totally taken by surprise one October afternoon when I turned onto section two of Xincheng South Road and saw a tile and concrete building with two minarets. I was particularly struck by the contrast between the tile structure in front of me and the Confucian Temple where just ten days earlier I had watched the celebration of the sage's 2527th birthday. Ceremony as well as wooden construction rendered the courtyards that comprised the Confucian complex a perfect fit anywhere in China. The street front presence of the mosque thus made as strong an impression on me as the building materials. Even a few weeks in East Asia were sufficient to know that a Chinese building should always have a gate in front of it and almost never is visible from the street.

Within the next few years, China opened to students and researchers like myself and simultaneously new survey books of China's greatest buildings began to appear. Both events followed more than forty years of international warfare, internal political struggle, changing allegiances and few opportunities for foreign researchers. Comparisons of surveys of Chinese architectural history of the 1930s and 1940s with those of the 1980s were striking. The core buildings of imperial China – palaces, tombs, altars, temples, and garden pavilions – were the same in all the books, but in the 1980s, ethnic construction, products of the groups referred to by the Chinese government as minority nationalities, were incorporated into the newly emerging architectural canon. Regional Buddhist and vernacular construction of Tibet, Mongolia, and parts of China that bordered Korea, Vietnam, Burma and the then Soviet Republics of Central Asia were represented in the books. Also included were at least two and sometimes as many as four mosques, in Guangzhou (Canton), Quanzhou (Zayton), Beijing, and Xi'an. What exactly China is, where her borders are, and what the criteria for a Chinese building might be are dynamic questions with changing answers. These four mosques and approximately 100 others that contain buildings datable before 1900 are located in China's twenty-two provinces

as well as in autonomous regions, but all are in territory that was part of the Chinese empires of Qin, Han, Tang, Song and Ming, or empires such as Yuan and Qing whose rulers were not Chinese.

I crossed Asia on my way home from Taiwan in 1977 and was able to study mosque architecture in India, Iran and Turkey. Since then I have seen and studied many more mosques, including the approximately seventy in China that are discussed in the pages that follow, and I have seen many times more than that number of religious and secular buildings in East Asia. The pre-modern Chinese mosques are different in materials and decoration from the mosque in Taipei. Yet the juxtaposition of mosque and Confucian temple that October day formulated questions that I am finally addressing here. The underlying question is how architecture of a monotheistic, aniconic religion came into existence in China and maintained a presence amid Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian and imperial monuments in the cities and countryside for nearly 1400 years.

I first addressed this question in 2006 when I talked about Chinese mosques in a panel on cultural convergence in mosque architecture at the annual meeting of the College Art Association. Research for that talk and a subsequent article informed me that even though extant pre-modern mosques had found their way into general histories of Chinese architecture, literature on the subject was confined to a handful of heavily illustrated monographs, sections of chapters on architecture of Chinese minority populations and several largely descriptive articles. At that time, I had seen only the four famous mosques mentioned above. I subsequently began a more systematic attempt to see mosques in China, to pick up pamphlets, short handbooks and other materials that would not normally make their way out of China, and to talk about Chinese mosques publicly and with colleagues as the occasions arose. Numerous lectures in North America and China followed, as did helpful and insightful discussions and correspondence with (in alphabetical order): Christopher Atwood, Zvi ben-Dor Benite, Sheila Blair, Jonathan Bloom, Michael Brose, John Chaffee, Hugh Clark, Nicola Di Cosmo, Dong Wei, Leopold Eisenlohr, F. Barry Flood, Dru Gladney, the late Oleg Grabar, Nile Green, Robert Hillenbrand, Renata Holod, Hasan-Udin Khan, Jonathan Lipman, Joseph Lowry, Susan Naquin, Gülru Necipoğlu, Bernard O'Kane, Kristian Petersen, Nasser Rabbat, Morris Rossabi, David Roxburgh, Chana Shapiro and Charles Steinhardt.

I could not have written this book or seen so many mosques discussed in it without support during the academic year 2012–13. A Dean's Fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania, School of Arts and Sciences, gave me a semester to do focused research and writing. A Senior Scholar Research Fellowship from the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation brought me to Harvard where the Sino-Islamic Seminar, a successor to a seminar founded by the late Joseph Fletcher, whose teaching and research had inspired me to

attempt Sino-Islamic topics as a graduate student, introduced me to researchers in the field and raised questions that I have tried to answer here. The Max Van Berchem Foundation supported my research in China during the summer of 2013. The extraordinary research trip included more than fifty mosques and mausoleums across the Central Plain, in North China, in Inner Mongolia and in Muslim autonomous regions and counties in eastern and western China. A casual conversation with Sheila Blair at Boston College in April of 2013 brought the expertise of the Islamic architectural field to this book: Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom travelled with me for two weeks that summer. Noticing what my eyes so familiar with Chinese architecture would have missed, and speaking Persian and Arabic when Chinese alone would not have gained one access, we entered prayer halls, photographed, heard anecdotes from *imams*, and then discussed through thousands of kilometers of all variety of roads so much that influenced the book that follows. I am truly grateful to everyone mentioned above for discussions, explanations, and confidence in this project, but to Sheila and Jonathan in addition for their enthusiasm, camaraderie, patience and persistence en route, and for their copious reading of a manuscript that otherwise would have gone to press with many misconceptions and mistakes.

My husband Paul and daughter Cindy were with me in 2011 when I studied mosques along China's southeastern coast from Guangzhou to Shanghai. I thank them and my three sons for willingness so many times to visit the un-trafficked and obscure in China when they would surely have preferred spending their time in Beijing, Xi'an or Shanghai; and for their spirited conversations and activities that inspire me everyday.

From the first inquiries about a book on Chinese mosques until the day it went to press, Robert Hillenbrand has supported and shepherded this book. I thank him for three years of correspondence, careful reading of drafts and insightful comments. At Edinburgh University Press I thank commissioning editor Nicola Ramsey for crucial care of this manuscript, particularly at early and late stages; assistant editor Ellie Bush for her interest and willingness to make sure so many aspects and details of this book were accomplished with care; and desk editor Eddie Clark for his attention to every aspect of maps, illustrations and layout. I also thank copy-editor Lel Gillingwater for her diligence and care for the most minute details. Finally, at Penn I owe endless gratitude to Constance Mood and Christal Springer, both in Visual Resources, and graduate student Sijie Ren for helping me prepare illustrations so that they could be sent to Edinburgh.

# Chronology of Chinese Dynasties and Selected Reigns

c.2070–1600 BCE	Xia Dynasty
c.1600–1946 BCE	Shang Dynasty
1046–221 BCE	Zhou Dynasty
	Western Zhou 1046–770 BCE
	Eastern Zhou 77–221 BCE
	Spring and Autumn Period 770–476 BCE
	Warring States Period 475–221 BCE
221–207 BCE	Qin Dynasty
206 BCE – 220 CE	Han Dynasty
	Western Han 206 BCE – 9 CE
	Xin Dynasty (Wang Mang Interregnum) 9–23
	Eastern Han 25–220
220–80	Three Kingdoms
	Wei 220–65
	Shu 221–63
	Wu 222–80
265–420	Jin Dynasty (the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties together with the Southern Dynasties are referred to as the Six Dynasties)
	Western Jin 281–316
	Eastern Jin 317–420
304–439	Sixteen Kingdoms
386–581	Northern Dynasties
	Northern Wei 386–534
	Eastern Wei 534–50
	Western Wei 535–57
	Northern Qi 550–77
	Northern Zhou 557–81
420–589	Southern Dynasties
	Liu-Song 420–79
	Southern Qi 479–502
	Liang 502–57
	Chen 557–89

581-618	Sui Dynasty
618-907	Tang Dynasty Taizong (r. 626-49) Xuanzong (r. 712-56)
907-79	Five Dynasties Later Liang 907-23 Later Tang 923-36 Later Jin 936-47 Later Han 947-50 Later Zhou 951-60
902-79	Ten Kingdoms Wu 902-37 Wu-Yue 902-78 Nanping or Jingnan 907-24 Shu 907-25 Southern Han 907-71 Min 909-45 Chu 927-51 Later Shu 935-65 Southern Tang 937-78 Northern Han 951-79
907-1125	Liao Dynasty
960-1279	Song Dynasty Northern Song 960-1127 Southern Song 1127-1279
1038-1227	Xi Xia Dynasty
1115-1234	Jin Dynasty
1271-1368	Yuan Dynasty Khubilai Khan (r. 1260-94)
1368-1644	Ming Dynasty Hongwu (r. 1368-98) Yongle (r. 1402-24) Jiajing (r. 1521-67) Wanli (r. 1572-1620)
1644-1911	Qing Dynasty Kangxi (r. 1662-1722) Qianlong (r. 1736-96) Jiaqing (r. 1796-1820) Xianfeng (r. 1851-61) Tongzhi (r. 1862-75) Guangxu (r. 1875-1908)

# Chronology of Selected Periods of Islamic History

661–750	Umayyad From Spain to Central Asia, including Syria, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, North Africa, Transoxiana Continues in Spain from 756–1031
750–1258	‘Abbasid Centred in Iraq through this period Shorter duration in Egypt, Syria, Iran, Transoxiana, North Africa
868–905	Tulunid Egypt and Syria
874–1001	Samanid Transoxiana, Afghanistan, Eastern Iran
932–1055	Buyid Iraq, Western Iran
909–1171	Fatimid Egypt, North Africa, shorter duration Syria
977–1186	Ghaznavid Transoxiana, Afghanistan, India
1038–1194	Saljuq Transoxiana, Anatolia, Iran, Iraq, Syria
1150–1231	Khwarazmshah Transoxiana, India
1171–1341	Ayyubid Egypt, Syria
1258–1335	Il-Khanid Iran, Iraq
1250–1517	Mamluk Egypt, Syria

1206–1526	Delhi Sultanates North India
1370–1501	Timurid Iran, Transoxiana
1501–1732	Safavid Iran
1526–1857	Mughal North India
1281–1924	Ottoman Anatolia/Turkey

## CHAPTER ONE

# Muslims, Mosques and Chinese Architecture

ARCHITECTURE OF THE Muslim faith stands in every province and autonomous region of China. In 2010 China's 23,308,000 Muslims, approximately 1.8 per cent of the Chinese population and 1.4 per cent of Muslims worldwide, were served by more than 30,000 mosques.<sup>1</sup> Muslims are identified in China's censuses and demographic analyses: among the fifty-six *minzu* (nationalities) recognised by the Chinese government, fifty-five are non-Han (non-native Chinese) populations and ten of those fifty-five comprise primarily Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Historically the largest Muslim population has been the Hui, a name derived from the character *hui* that since the fourteenth century has been translated as 'Muslim'. Today Hui number more than ten million. Hui live across China, particularly in the north, but in areas of south China as well. They are the major Muslim *minzu* in every part of China except Xinjiang and certain regions that border it (Map 1.1). Chinese Muslims who do not have roots in the other nine Muslim nationalities are de facto labelled Hui. Most of the approximately 100 Chinese mosques that bear evidence of the nearly 1400-year presence of Islam in China, hereafter referred to as old mosques, are associated with the Hui. The more than ten million Uyghurs are the second major Muslim *minzu* in China. Uyghurs spread across Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region from Kashgar in the west to Turfan in the east, a territory sometimes known as Chinese Central Asia and in earlier times as Chinese Turkestan. Sharing its border with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, Gansu, Qinghai and Tibet, Xinjiang has approximately eleven million Muslims, more than any other province or autonomous region of China; in 2013 10,019,758 of them were Uyghur.<sup>3</sup> Kazak, Kirghiz, Tajik, Tartar, Uzbek, Dongxiang, Sala and Bao'an are the other eight primarily Muslim *minzu*.

### Muslims and Other West Asians in China before the Tenth Century

Foreigners from western lands came to China in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE; interregnum 9–23 CE). Ambassadors brought gifts



**Map 1.1** Locations of Chinese provinces, autonomous regions, capitals and major cities.





**Figure 1.1** Sasanian glass, height 8 cm, diameter of mouth 9.5 cm, excavated in tomb of Li Xian (d. 569), Guyuan, Ningxia.

and merchants carried spices, glass and metal vessels. The land route from the Mediterranean to China took about two years, and only rarely, if at all, did someone from Rome reach China or did a Chinese reach Rome.<sup>4</sup> Often merchants travelled part of the route, passing on and receiving goods from those more familiar with other portions of it. The Parthians, who spread east and west of the Caspian Sea and as far south as the Persian Gulf, were among the important middlemen in Eurasian trade during the Han period.<sup>5</sup> Sea routes also were open during the Han dynasty. China's official histories record both foreign envoys in China and information about lands and people from the West. The confirmed record begins when Han emperor Wudi (r. 141–87 BCE) sent Zhang Qian (d. c. 113 BCE) on a westward mission that lasted more than ten years in the 130s and 120s. The journey is recorded in *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian), *Hanshu* (Standard History of the Han dynasty), and other sources.<sup>6</sup> Gan Ying of China reached Parthia on a mission whose destination was Rome and that began in 97 CE.<sup>7</sup> Even if written records are exaggerated or not verifiable, material evidence of trans-Asian trade and gifting along the Silk Roads from as far west as Rome and as far east as the Han capital Luoyang in Henan province is increasingly rich and extensive. Roman glass, Persian metalwork and coins of the known world have been uncovered in tombs of the Han and subsequent eight centuries (Figures 1.1 and 1.2).<sup>8</sup>

Chinese official records generically label peoples from beyond China's borders as Hu. Hu are afforded their own sections in the standard histories, with subsections for specific groups among the Hu. Although historically 'barbarians' has been the unfortunate word choice for a translation of the character *hu*, Hu have come in and out of China, worked there, worshipped there and sometimes settled there since the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>9</sup> That they were designated by such a strong term perhaps is best



**Figure 1.2** Sasanian plate, silver, diameter 18 cm, excavated in tomb of Feng Hetu, Datong, Shanxi, 504.



**Figure 1.3** Figurine of man with curly hair and high boots, height 9.6 cm, painted pottery, excavated in tomb of Yuan Shao, Luoyang, Northern Wei, early sixth century.

understood as a statement that foreigners stood out among the Chinese population. Painters and sculptors captured the physical features and clothing of people who passed through or resided in China's cities. The figurine of a Westerner found in the tomb of Yuan Shao (d. 559), a descendant of royalty, in Luoyang, wears high leather boots and has curly hair (Figure 1.3). A man with black hair, a heavy beard and eyebrows, a large nose and wide eyes painted on the wall of a tomb in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, in 577, may be from as far west of China as Persia (Figure 1.4). Transmigration across the



**Figure 1.4** Swarthy male with large nose and heavy beard, identified by excavators as Hu. East wall, tomb of Xu Xianxiu (d. 571), Taiyuan.



**Figure 1.5** Men of Goguryeo. Detail of mural of ambassadors to the Sogdians, west wall, palace, Afrasiab, circa 650–75.

Asian continent probably brought images of peoples from the known world further than they had actually travelled. No written document confirms the presence of men of Goguryeo, the northernmost of the kingdoms of Korea's Three Kingdom's period (c. 57–668), in Samarkand. Yet they appear in a mid-seventh-century mural in a palace in Afrasiab (today Samarkand, Uzbekistan) whose subject has been interpreted as ambassadors of the world bringing gifts to the Sogdian king (Figure 1.5).<sup>10</sup>

Persia under Sasanian rule (224–651) was well known in China. *Weishu* (Standard History of Wei), compiled by Wei Shou (506–72) for the years 386–550, informs us:

the capital of the country of Bosi (Persia) is the walled city of Suli (Ctesiphon) . . . 24, 228 *li* (about 12,114 km) from Taiyuan [a capital of the Northern Qi dynasty (550–77) in Shanxi province and the location of the mural in Figure 1.4] . . . [The] city has an area of ten sq *li* . . . and more than 100,000 households . . . The land is flat and produces gold, silver, zinc ore, coral, amber, cornelian, agate, large pearls, glass, opaque glass, rock-crystal, emeralds, diamonds, red beads, steel, copper, tin, cinnabar, mercury, gold brocade, cotton cloth, felt, woolen rugs, red roebuck, hides, frankincense . . . black pepper, long pepper, crystallised honey, edible dates . . . The climate is hot and sultry and the people keep ice in their houses. The land abounds in sand and rocks . . . The king has . . . ten more or lesser camps like the detached palaces in China . . . Every year in the fourth [lunar] month he goes on a tour . . . Elephants are used in combat . . . The sixth month is taken to be the beginning of the year . . .<sup>11</sup>

Another record comes from the Buddhist monk Xuanzang (602–64). Born near Luoyang and a student in Chang'an (today Xi'an), both capitals of the Tang dynasty (618–907), the monk journeyed west from Chang'an to the sources of Buddhism in India in 629.<sup>12</sup> Sixteen years later he returned to Chang'an with a detailed account of Buddhist monuments of Xinjiang, India, and places in between, including Afghanistan. Xuanzang was not in Persia, but he writes about it. He describes Ctesiphon as Persia's chief city with a circumference of about 20 km and Persia as a country of fine horses and camels, a producer of gold, silver, copper, rock-crystal, rare pearls and special treasures, and with craftsmen who weave brocade silk, wool and carpets and use large silver coins. The Chinese monk also notes the practice of Zoroastrianism.<sup>13</sup>

The Sasanian court sent at least seventeen embassies to China between 455 and 616/17. Some came to Jiankang, today Nanjing, capital of south-eastern China at the time, and some went to Luoyang. In 638/9 and again in 647/8, Yazdegerd III (590–651) requested help from China against the Arabs and other enemies. His son Peroz III made similar requests in the 650s and in 661. Neither the Chinese emperor Gaozong (r. 649–83) nor his father offered military help, but from about 671–8 Peroz was given safe passage and asylum in Chang'an. In 708, Peroz's son Narseh arrived in the Chinese capital.<sup>14</sup> Zoroastrian temples were built in Chang'an at this time when thousands of Persians may have accompanied their fallen rulers eastward.<sup>15</sup>

The religious transformation in Persia is noted by Hyecho (704–787), a Korean trained as a Buddhist monk in China who travelled west to India, Persia and other places. He writes that the country had been 'swallowed up by Arabs' who worship Tian (Allah).<sup>16</sup>

It was around this time that the first Muslims came to China. According to tradition, an envoy from the region called Dashiguo (usually translated 'Arab lands') in Chinese paid his respects to Emperor Gaozong of the Tang dynasty in the capital city Chang'an in 651.<sup>17</sup> Muslims are assumed to have been among the men in thirty-five embassies that came from Arabia to China between 651 and 798.<sup>18</sup> By the ninth and tenth centuries, Arabic histories describe China. The chronicle *'Akhbar al-Sin wa'l-Hind* (Notes on China and India) of 851 offers details about Chinese food, city life, marriage, the legal system, education, the use of steles and burial, and makes the explicit statement that architecture is made of wood.<sup>19</sup>

Muslims who entered China in the seventh century were ambassadors or merchants. They would have been as noticeable on the streets of Chang'an as the men in Figures 1.3 and 1.4, but there is no reason to believe they had aspirations to proselytise. Nor is it clear that conversion was on the agenda of the Zoroastrians, Manichaeans or Church of the East (Nestorian) Christians practising their faiths in China before the arrival of Islam. Before major religious persecutions by the Chinese emperor during the years 844–5 (known as the Huichang persecutions), the capital Chang'an had six religious institutions of Zoroastrianism, an unspecified number for Manichaeism, one or two for Nestorians<sup>20</sup> and hundreds of Buddhist and Daoist monasteries.<sup>21</sup>

The best record of a mosque in the Tang capital is a line on a placard at the mosque today known as Daxuexixiang Mosque in a Muslim neighborhood of Xi'an that implies imperial sanction for the building between 705 and 710.<sup>22</sup> However, no structure at the mosque dates earlier than the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Reliable records about mosques anywhere in Tang China are scarce. Legend recounts a mosque in the city of Kaifeng either in 628 or in 742<sup>23</sup> and an inscription records a date of 627 for the founding of a mosque in Guangzhou, discussed below. The early dates, so soon after the *hijra*, Muhammad's flight from Makkah (hereafter Mecca) to Madina (hereafter Medina) in 622, are almost impossibly early, and even 742 is unlikely. Kaifeng did not become a significant city in China until the tenth century.

The presence of an international population in a country's large cities does not guarantee either that they will worship in the manners of their homelands or that the religious institutions of their homelands will find places in the foreign land. Solid evidence confirms that Muslims settled in China after the Tang dynasty, and that they built mosques, Muslim cemeteries and educational institutions. It may be inferred that Muslims in Tang Chang'an worshipped in residential spaces, following a practice established by Muhammad in the initial decade of Islam. It might also be inferred that the Muslim population in the Tang capital was more temporary than settled, the envoys and merchants staying only long enough to gather what they

needed to report or sell back home, so that whatever worship spaces they used were not as noteworthy as those of Zoroastrians who had emigrated to China after the Muslims conquered Persia, or those of Manichaeans or Christians who also came to settle. The huge international population in Chang'an and extensive records of activities in the 108 city wards suggest both that there would not have been restrictions on mosque construction, and that if a recognisable mosque had existed, it would have been known.

The most convincing reason that a mosque might not have existed in Chang'an in Tang times may be transportation: the majority of Muslims came to China by boat. Travel to Chang'an from the west was almost exclusively by land along the old Silk Roads. Sea routes circled southern India, with ships arriving at port cities along China's south-eastern and eastern coasts from Guangzhou to Yangzhou. This route is sometimes referred to as the Silk Road of the Sea.<sup>24</sup> Entry into China's ports for mercantile purposes became even more frequent after the fall of the Tang dynasty, when land travel across Central Asia became more dangerous.

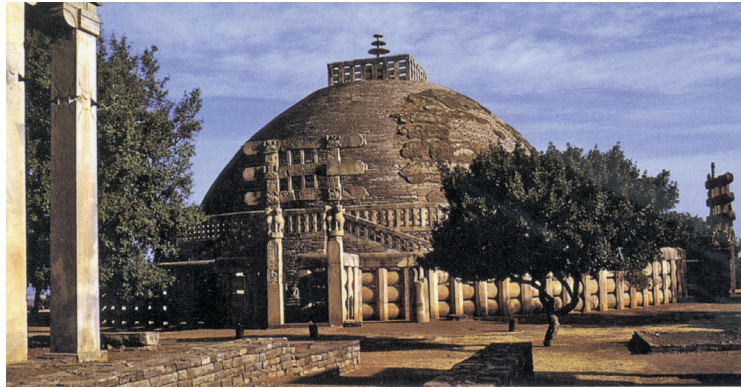
Whenever and wherever a Muslim entered China, in the Tang or Song (960–1279) dynasty or later, the architecture around him was already a coherent, multi-millennia-old system of construction primarily in wood, and occasionally in brick or stone. From any location, a Muslim's first view of China would have included brightly painted wooden pillars and beams, ceramic tile roofs and bracket sets that interlocked with the pillars below them or the beams above. The architecture was not that different from the wooden structures that Buddhists saw when they came to China in the early centuries of the Common Era.

### **The Buddhist Model**

The first Buddhists came to China from lands to the west in the first or second century CE. They were primarily transmitters of their doctrine. According to a popular historical narrative, the Chinese emperor Mingdi (r. 57–75) dreamed of a golden image whose identity was interpreted at court as the Buddha. Thereupon messengers were sent west to bring back information about this image and its powers.<sup>25</sup> Even if the story is apocryphal, solid evidence confirms that in 148 CE a Parthian named An Shigao (d. 168) arrived in the Han capital Luoyang and translated Buddhist scriptures there until his death.<sup>26</sup> By the fifth century, portable elements of Buddhist worship such as miniature pagodas were carried along the Silk Roads into China.<sup>27</sup> Remains of earlier Buddhist architecture survive in the deserts of Xinjiang province.<sup>28</sup>

Sites such as Loulan, Miran and Niya, identified by Aurel Stein and other explorers in the early twentieth century and excavated by Chinese research teams since the mid-twentieth century, affirm that

**Figure 1.6** Examples of dated buildings showing the evolution from stupa to pagoda.



**Figure 1.6a** Stupa I, Sanci, Madhya Pradesh, India, circa first century BCE.



**Figure 1.6b** Gao Yi que, Ya'an, Sichuan, early third century CE.

the three fundamental structures of Indian Buddhist worship space were built in desert environments. One is the stūpa (hereafter stupa), the relic mound that symbolises the Buddha's death and comes to be called pagoda in East Asia (Figure 1.6a).<sup>29</sup> The second is the rock-carved worship space known as *c(h)aitya* and the third is the *vihara*, a cluster of cells for monastic meditation and residence.<sup>30</sup>

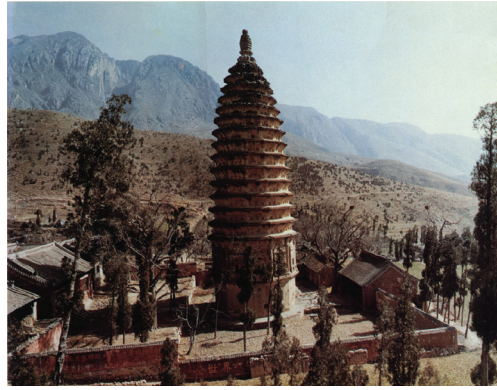
The transformation from stupa to pagoda, a form that would continue to move eastward with Buddhism from China to Korea and Japan, is a model of the process whereby a foreign structure is adopted and adapted into the Chinese building system. The circular, single-storey building with an egg-shaped dome gained height in Central Asia (Figure 1.6c), and upon entry into China the circular plans became straight-edged polygons: rectangles, hexagons and octagons. Made of mud brick, baked brick or stone, Chinese versions



**Figure 1.6c** *Mor Stupa, Kashgar, circa third century CE.*

of this form could be multi-storey and decorated with facsimile pillars, beams and bracket sets that were moulded onto the surface and with imitation ceramic tile roofs at each level. Desiring height, Chinese builders turned to existing tall buildings for models. In the first and second centuries CE, those structures were ceremonial pillar-towers known as *que* at entries to palaces and along the paths to important tombs. It is impossible to know how many *que* stood in China when Buddhists arrived there, but they were certainly visible in the capital cities. Today about thirty survive.<sup>31</sup> Individual *que* had four-sided ground plans, and sometimes *que* were produced with two, three or even four linked, four-sided towers so that the base was a set of diagonally positioned quadrilaterals. *Que* is the most important native Chinese structure that influences pagoda construction (Figure 1.6b).

The site of one of China's earliest pagodas is in Fangshan, just north of Datong, in northern Shanxi province. The remains are at a monastery known as Siyuan Fosi (Buddhist Monastery of the Contemplative Courtyard) from the period when Pingcheng (today Datong) was the Northern Wei capital (398–493).<sup>32</sup> The earliest standing pagodas in China, outside Xinjiang, date from the sixth century. A pagoda dated 523 is the unique dodecagonal Chinese building. In all likelihood this was an attempt to form a circular building with straight-edged brick segments (Figure 1.6d). Pagodas change in style more dramatically than any other structure in China. Their position in a monastery also varies. Pagodas may be placed along the central building axis, erected in pairs or isolated in their own precincts at various places in the monastery; or a monastery may have no pagoda. Often the façades of masonry pagodas are decorated with elements such as pillars and bracket sets that imitate wooden architecture.<sup>33</sup> The continuous changes in style and position reflect a lack of compatibility with the Chinese building system, for no matter when a pagoda was built or where it stands in its monastery or in China,



**Figure 1.6d** *Songyue Monastery Pagoda, Mount Song, Henan, 523, with twenty-first-century refacing.*



**Figure 1.6e** *Pagoda, Bao'en Monastery, Suzhou, Jiangsu 1131–62.*

as shown in Figure 1.6d, it sticks out, ever a reminder of the foreign origins of Buddhism, even though the religion was fully accepted and flourished in China independent of its Indian roots. A few minarets, similarly, would project above the walls of Chinese mosques as signs of the presence of a foreign religion.

The second of the Buddhist spaces, the rock-carved *chaitya*, was constructed in China where possible. Rock-hewn Buddhist caves from Gansu in the west to Liaoning in the north-east to Jiangsu in the south-east and Sichuan in the south-west, at places still famous today for their monumental and expansive stone-carved cave statuary and murals such as Dunhuang, Yungang, Longmen and Dazu, exemplify the incorporation of Buddhist rock-carved worship space into Chinese architectural environments. From the façades of massive monoliths to individual passages on walls, Chinese architectural frameworks were mediums through which the sacred spaces of South Asian worshippers were transposed as Chinese. Buddhist