

= Foguang Temple =

Foguang Temple (Chinese : 佛光寺) is a Buddhist temple located five kilometres from Doucun , Wutai County , Shanxi Province of China . The major hall of the temple is the Great East Hall , built in 857 AD , during the Tang Dynasty (618 ? 907) . According to architectural records , it is the third earliest preserved timber structure in China . It was rediscovered by the 20th @-@ century architectural historian Liang Sicheng (1901 ? 1972) in 1937 , while an older hall at Nanchan Temple was discovered by the same team a year later . The temple also contains another significant hall dating from 1137 called the Manjusri Hall . In addition , the second oldest existing pagoda in China (after the Songyue Pagoda) , dating from the 6th century , is located in the temple grounds . Today the temple is part of a UNESCO World Heritage site and is undergoing restoration .

= = History = =

The temple was established in the fifth century during the Northern Wei dynasty . From the years of 785 to 820 , the temple underwent an active building period when a three level , 32 m tall pavilion was built . In 845 , Emperor Wuzong banned Buddhism in China . As part of the persecution , Foguang temple was burned to the ground , with only the Zushi pagoda surviving from the temple 's early history . Twelve years later in 857 the temple was rebuilt , with the Great East Hall being built on the former site of a three storey pavilion . A woman named Ning Gongyu provided most of the funds needed to construct the hall , and its construction was led by a monk named Yuancheng . In the 10th century , a depiction of Foguang Temple was painted in cave 61 of the Mogao Grottoes . However , it is likely the painters had never seen the temple , because the main hall in the painting is a two @-@ storied white building with a green @-@ glaze roof , very different from the red and white of the Great East Hall . This painting indicates that Foguang Temple was an important stop for Buddhist pilgrims . In 1137 of the Jin dynasty , the Manjusri Hall was constructed on the temple 's north side , along with another hall dedicated to Samantabhadra , which was burnt down in the Qing Dynasty (1644 @-@ 1912) .

In 1930 , the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture began a search in China for ancient buildings . In the seventh year of the society 's search in 1937 , an architectural team led by Liang Sicheng discovered that Foguang Temple was a relic of the Tang Dynasty . Liang was able to date the building after his wife found an inscription on one of the rafters . The date 's accuracy was confirmed by Liang 's study of the building which matched with known information about Tang buildings .

= = Layout = =

Unlike most other Chinese temples which are oriented in a south @-@ north position , the Foguang temple is oriented in an east @-@ west position due to there being mountains located on the east , north and south . Having mountains behind a building is believed to improve its Feng Shui . The temple consists of two main halls . The northern hall is called The Hall of Manjusri and was constructed in 1147 during the Jin dynasty . The largest hall , the Great East Hall was constructed in 857 during the Tang Dynasty . Another large hall , known as the Samantabhadra Hall , once existed on the south side of the monastery but is no longer extant .

= = = Great East Hall = = =

Dating from 857 of the Tang Dynasty , the Great East Hall (???) is the third oldest dated wooden building in China after the main hall of the Nanchan Temple dated to 782 , and the main hall of the Five Dragons Temple , dated to 831 . The hall is located on the far east side of the temple , atop a large stone platform . It is a single storey structure measuring seven bays by four or 34 by 17 @-@ 7 metres (110 by 58 ft) , and is supported by inner and outer sets of columns . On top of each column is a complicated set of brackets containing seven different bracket types that are one @-@

third as high as the column itself . Supporting the roof of the hall , each of the bracket sets are connected by crescent shaped crossbeams , which create an inner ring above the inner set of columns and an outer ring above the outer columns . The hall has a lattice ceiling that conceals much of the roof frame from view . The hipped @-@ roof and the extremely complex bracket sets are testament to the Great East Hall 's importance as a structure during the Tang Dynasty . According to the 11th @-@ century architectural treatise , Yingzao Fashi , the Great East Hall closely corresponds to a seventh rank building in a system of eight ranks . The high rank of the Great East Hall indicates that even in the Tang Dynasty it was an important building , and no other buildings from the period with such a high rank survive .

Inside the hall are thirty @-@ six sculptures , as well as murals on each wall that date from the Tang Dynasty and later periods . Unfortunately the statues lost much artistic value when they were repainted in the 1930s . The centre of the hall has a platform with three large statues of Sakyamuni , Amitabha and Maitreya sitting on lotus shaped seats . Each of the three statues is flanked by four assistants on the side and two bodhisattvas in front . Next to the platform , there are statues of Manjusri riding a lion as well as Samantabhadra on an elephant . Two heavenly kings stand on either side of the dais . A statue representing the hall 's benefactor , Ning Gongwu and one of the monk who helped build the hall Yuancheng , are present in the back of the hall . There is one large mural in the hall that shows events that took place in the Jataka , which chronicles Buddha 's past life . Smaller murals in the temple show Manjusri and Samantabhadra gathering donors to help support the upkeep of the temple .

= = = Hall of Manjusri = = =

On the north side of the temple courtyard is the Manjusri Hall (???) . It was constructed in 1137 during the Jin dynasty and is roughly the same size as the East Hall , also measuring seven bays by four . It is located on an 83 cm (2 @.@ 7 ft) high platform , has three front doors and one central back door , and features a single @-@ eave hip gable roof . The interior of the hall has only four support pillars . In order to support the large roof , diagonal beams are used . On each of the four walls are murals of arhats painted in 1429 during the Ming dynasty .

= = = Zushi Pagoda = = =

The Zushi Pagoda (???) , is a small funerary pagoda located to the south of the Great East Hall . While it is unclear as to the exact date of its construction , it was either built during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386 @-@ 534) or Northern Qi Dynasty (550 @-@ 577) and possibly contains the tomb of the founder of the Foguang Temple . It is a white , hexagonal shaped 6 metres (20 ft) tall pagoda . The first storey of the pagoda has a hexagonal chamber , while the second storey is purely decorative . The pagoda is decorated with lotus petals and the steeple supports a precious bottle in the shape of a flower .

= = = Funerary pillars = = =

The temple grounds contain two Tang Dynasty funerary pillars . The oldest one , which 3 @.@ 24 meters (10 @.@ 6 ft) tall and hexagonal , was built in 857 to record the East Hall 's construction .

= = The present = =

Beginning in 2005 , Global Heritage Fund (GHF) , in partnership with Tsinghua University (Beijing) , has been working to conserve the cultural heritage of Foguang Temple 's Great East Hall . The hall has not had any restoration work done since the 17th century , and suffers from water damage and rotting beams . Despite the temple undergoing restoration , it is still open to the public . On June 26 , 2009 , the temple was inscribed as part of the Mount Wutai UNESCO World Heritage Site .