

## = Shanhua Temple =

Shanhua Temple ( Chinese : 善化寺 ; pinyin : Shàn huà Sì ) is a Buddhist temple located in Datong , Shanxi Province , China . The temple was first founded during the early 8th century of the Tang Dynasty , but its earliest surviving building dates from the 11th century . The temple was heavily repaired over the years , and today three original halls and two recently rebuilt pavilions survive . The largest , and earliest hall , dating from the 11th @-@ century Liao Dynasty , is the Mahavira Hall and is one of the largest of its kind in China . Also historically significant are the Main Gate and Sansheng Hall , both dating from 12th century during the Jin dynasty .

## = = History = =

The Shanhua Temple was first founded during the Kaiyuan period of the Tang Dynasty ( 713 @-@ 741 ) under the patronage of emperor Xuanzong , at which time it was known as the Kaiyuan Temple . After the fall of the Tang Dynasty during the Five Dynasties period ( 906 @-@ 960 ) , the temple underwent a name change and was known as Da Pu ? ensi . During this chaotic time , out of ten buildings at the temple , only three or four escaped destruction . After the takeover by the Liao Dynasty in 960 , the temple assumed its present configuration .

The temple was again heavily damaged when the Jin dynasty took over in 1120 , and in 1128 repair work was started that took fifteen years to complete . In 1421 , more repairs were undertaken , this time by a monk named Dayong . In 1445 , he received an imperial presentation of sutras . This is also the first time that the temple was referred to by its present name , Shanhua Temple . In the late 16th century , drum and bell towers were built on the same stone platform ( yuetai , ?? ) supporting the Mahavira Hall . Further repairs were made to the temple over the next two hundred years but by the late 18th century the temple was once again in a state of disrepair , and the use of one of the halls as a camel stable had caused a wall to collapse . During World War II , the Puxian pavilion was destroyed , and was rebuilt in 1953 .

## = = Architecture = =

The Shanhua Temple today consists of three main halls ( The Mahavira Hall , the Sansheng Hall and the Main Gate ) arranged on a north @-@ south axis and two pavilions located to the east and west of the Sansheng Hall . There are also two smaller halls on each side of the Mahavira Hall . The main halls were all first built during the Liao Dynasty ( 907 @-@ 1125 ) , but only the Mahavira Hall is now considered a Liao Building . The Main Gate and Sansheng Hall were extensively renovated during the subsequent Jin dynasty , and are classified by scholars as being Jin buildings .

## = = = Main Hall = = =

The Main or Mahavira Hall ( ????? , Dàxiongb?o Diàn ) is the northernmost and largest hall , and dates from the 11th century . It measures seven by five bays ( 40 @.@ 5 by 25 m ) and has three doors at the front of the hall . The hall is built on an elevated three meter high platform that was once the site of both a drum and bell tower that are no longer extant . According to the standards in the 11th @-@ century Chinese architectural treatise Yingzao Fashi , the hall is held up by fifth rank bracket sets ( ?? ) in a system of eight ranks . The interior contains four large Buddha statues representing the four cardinal directions , and a central statue representing Sakyamuni . The statues are similar , and represent the Buddha displaying different mudras ( symbolic hand gestures ) . Above the Sakyamuni statue , is a caisson ( Chinese : ?? ; pinyin : z?oj?ng ) , an octagonal wooden ceiling that is painted and decorated .

Along with other statues of disciples and attendants grouped with the large statues , there are also 24 deva statues located next to the east and west walls . There are 190 square meters of murals in the hall . They date from 1708 to 1716 , but have been damaged over the years .

### === Sansheng Hall ===

The Sansheng Hall ( Chinese : 三聖殿 ; pinyin : Sānshèng Diàn ; literally : " Hall of Three Sages " ) is the middle hall , and was built during the Jin dynasty . It houses statues of the three sages of the Avatamsaka Sutra - a central one of Vairocana ( the universal aspect of Shakyamuni ) and two accompanying statues of Manjusri and Samantabhadra . The hall has very few central pillars for its support and depends on complex rafters and brackets of the 6th rank for its support .

### === Puxian Pavilion ===

The Puxian Pavilion ( Chinese : 普賢閣 ; pinyin : Pǔxián Gé ) was initially built during the Liao Dynasty , and was examined by Liang Sicheng in the 1930s . He reported a heavily damaged structure with two stories . On the first story was a miniature building and niche with two images . On the top story was a statue of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra .

The building was rebuilt in 1953 after having been destroyed during the war . The pavilion measures three bays by two , but is nearly a perfect square . It is built on a short stone platform called a yuetai ( 月台 ) which is accessed by a short set of stairs . While from the outside , the pavilion appears to only have two stories , there are actually three , with the second floor being hidden from outside view . Each of the exterior levels is surrounded by a perimeter of columns .

### === Wenshu Pavilion ===

This pavilion ( Chinese : 文殊閣 ; pinyin : Wénshū Gé ) was destroyed in the early 20th century after it caught fire after being converted into a tannery . It was rebuilt in 2008 by the local government .

### === Main Gate ===

The Main Gate ( Chinese : 山門 ; pinyin : Shān Mén ) is a large hall that was built during the Jin dynasty in the 12th century , and is the entrance building of the temple . The hall contains statues of the four heavenly kings , with two on the east side , and two on the west side . It is five bays long , and two bays wide and has an area of 278 square meters . The brackets used to support the structure are of the 5th rank .