WORSHIP

The Architecture of Buddhist Temples and Shintō Shrines

The Shōun Pagoda of Kannōji temple towered at long last in completed splendor. As each course of scaffolding was removed another of the pagoda's five stories appeared, until finally it stood revealed in all its lofty glory.

The novel from which this passage is quoted (*The Five-story Pagoda* by Kōda Rohan) takes as its theme the imperishability of artistic inspiration. The choice of a pagoda to symbolize this message is particularly acute, as this structure has been the central identifying element of the temple complex ever since the introduction of Buddhism into Japan over fourteen hundred years ago.

Japan's religious architecture centers on Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines. Temple architecture was imported very soon after the introduction of the basic doctrines of the faith in the mid sixth century from the Korean Kingdom of Paekche. For the early Japanese, the Buddhist creed represented not only a new and immensely profound world view, but also one of the most impressive expressions of highly developed culture from the Asian continent. The Buddhist religion and its attendant art and architecture was for the early Japanese a route to higher civilization and international prestige. By the end of the sixteenth century Japan was building imposing monasteries on the Continental model, and by the mid eighth century a national system of provincial temples had been established with a well-developed ecclesiastical organization to maintain it.

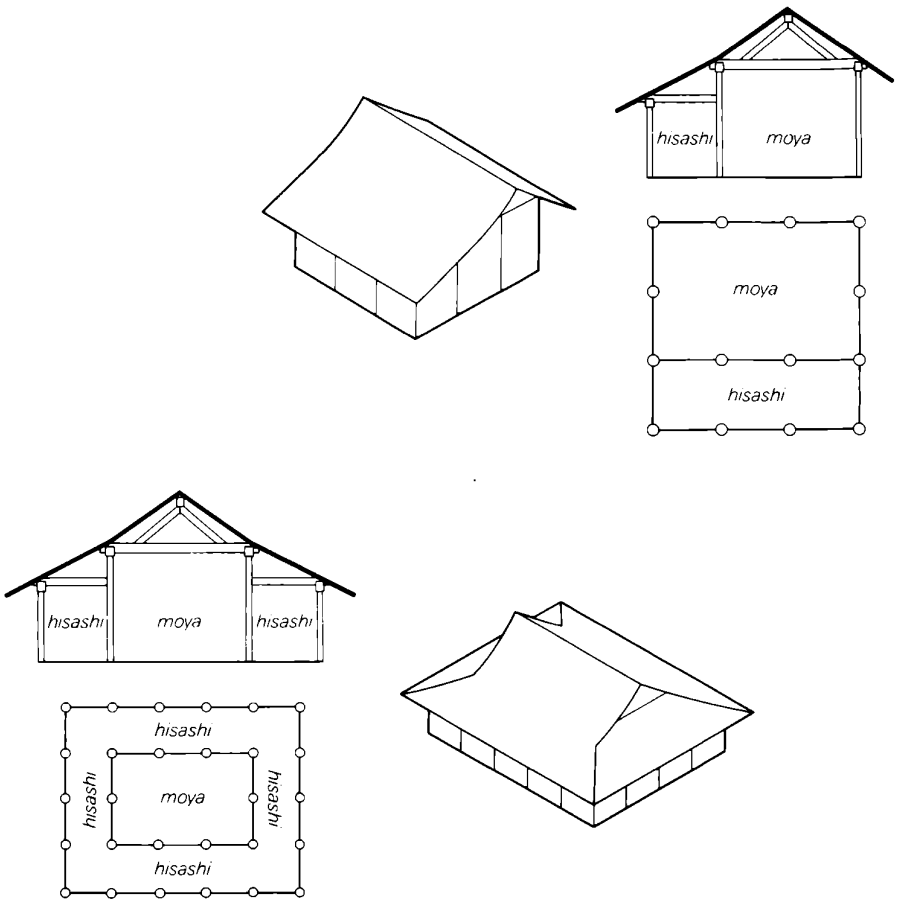
Together with sculptural and painted images, the pagoda and the other buildings in the temple complex have served as the tangible correlatives of the idea of faith. Indeed, throughout Japanese history much of the best of the country's human and economic resources has been lavished on their construction. Especially in the classical period (eighth through twelfth centuries) and the medieval period (thirteenth through sixteenth centuries), Buddhist architecture took the lead in introducing new structural and ornamental features. Buddhist buildings are thus of critical importance not only to all other Japanese architecture but to the entire corpus of Japanese art.

Shintō, "the Way of the Gods," is Japan's indigenous religion. Not surprisingly, the roots of Shintō architecture go back to the very beginnings of Japanese civilization, and Shintō shrines have their own unique forms. The configuration of the Grand Shrine at Ise, for example, hearkens back to the granaries of the preliterary age, and its simple grandeur excites the same admiration as the best of the Buddhist tradition. The designs of most of the shrine types we know today, however, took their mature forms only in the eighth century, at which time Japan had already been heavily influenced by Buddhism. The history of the architecture of these two faiths is thus tightly interwoven. For example, the Tōshōgū shrine at Nikkō, the mausoleum of the first Tokugawa shōgun, looks at first glance to be more of a Buddhist temple than a Shintō shrine, and in sheer opulence and display it rivals or surpasses any Buddhist structure in Japan (figs. 77–79). The German architect Bruno Taut praised the purity and simplicity of Ise Shrine, but condemned Nikkō's ornamentation as artificial. His criticism is by no means incontestable, but it does suggests the range and richness of the body of Shintō architecture.

Religious architecture, particularly that of Buddhist temples, is a fitting place to begin our discussion, for many of the basic concepts introduced will apply to other Japanese building types. The temple, constructed by and large of wood but often resting on a podium faced with stone, is generally designed on the post and lintel principle, with nonbearing walls in the bays (*ken*) between each pair of posts. Resting above is a grand roof, originally of tile but later with variations such as wood shingle, whose eaves are cantilevered far out over the verandas by means of a system of brackets. The brackets rest on the posts beneath and sometimes in the intercolumnar spaces as well. The core of the temple, the *moya*, is usually one, three, five, or some other odd number of bays in width by two in depth. Surrounding this central core on most structures are peripheral sections called *hisashi*, usually one bay in width. Hisashi with separate pent roofs beneath the main roof are called *mokoshi*, and they may surround the moya directly or, as is more frequently the case, serve as tertiary spaces and border the hisashi that are under the main roof (figs. 1, 16). A building with a moya three bays wide will thus usually have a five-bay facade (in the absence of mokoshi or other additions) as it includes the hisashi widths on both sides.

We will begin our discussion with the oldest ex-

tant temple in Japan, Hōryūji, and use it as a starting point for an introduction to the temple complex and its main structures—the pagoda and image hall—together with the corridor and inner gate that enclose them, and the subsidiary structures outside that corridor (figs. 1–2). Thereafter we will trace the changes that affected the temple plan and the styles of the constituent structures as religious and engineering innovations occurred at home or were introduced from China. These include the rise of the so-called Esoteric mountain sects and the concurrent breakdown of the regular temple plan, the growth of elegant private temple complexes for Kyōto aristocrats, then the introduction of the Zen and the Great Buddha styles from Sung-dynasty China and the inevitable eclecticism that resulted in the medieval era. We will end the chapter with a look at the origins and developments of Shintō architecture, paying special attention to both its unique features and those that show the influence of Buddhist building concepts.



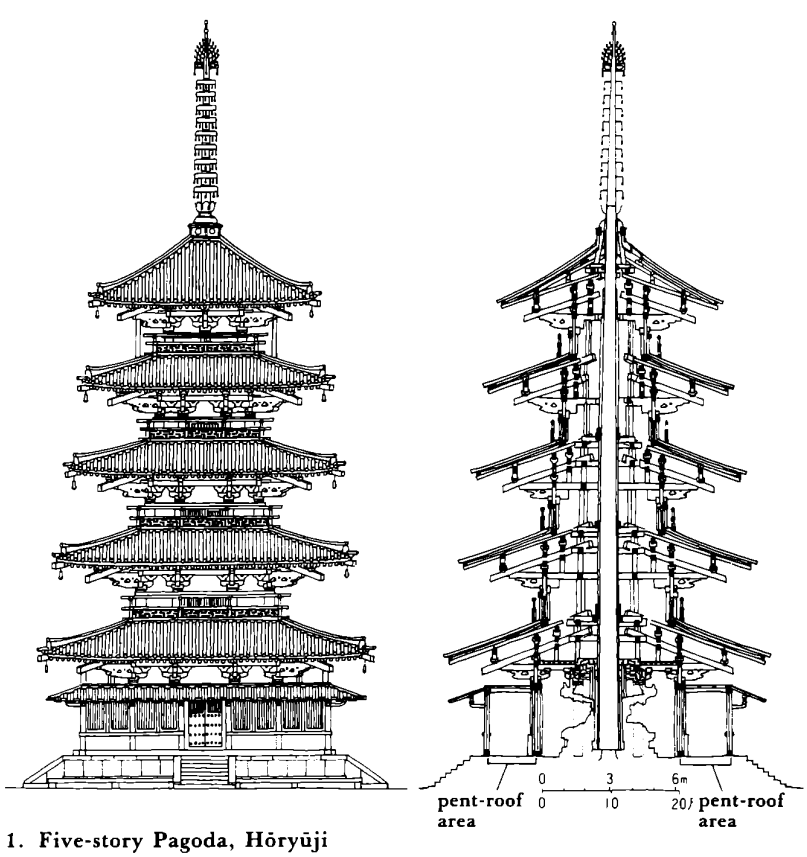
HŌRYŪJI TEMPLE AND ITS SYMBOL, THE PAGODA

Japan's Oldest Extant Temple Complex On the plain of Ikaruga, just outside the ancient capital of Nara, Hōryūji temple stands in serene silence. Backed by gentle hills, the temple presents an image of beauty and strength synonymous with the best in Japanese Buddhist architecture. Hōryūji's Five-story Pagoda (Gojū no Tō; figs. 1–2) together with the Golden Hall (Kondō) next to it, the Inner Gate (Chūmon), and most of the surrounding Corridor (Kairō; fig. 2) are the oldest surviving wooden buildings in the world and a logical starting point for a discussion of Buddhist architecture in Japan.

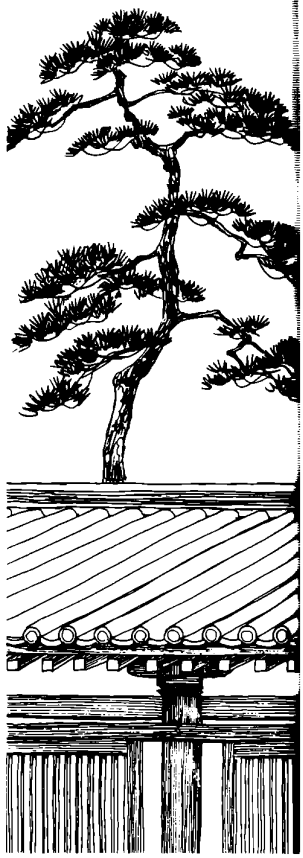
The history of Hōryūji began in A.D. 587, when the Emperor Yōmei, suffering from an illness, set about to construct a temple for the worship of Buddhist images. His piety proved fruitless and he died in the same year, but the Empress Suiko and her regent, Prince Shōtoku, carried out his wishes and saw the temple project through to completion in 607. The Hōryūji they built, however, was consumed by fire in 670, and it is the rebuilt version that stands today.

The Asuka Style The exact years of the reconstruction of Hōryūji remain conjectural, with some suggesting a date as late as the Nara period (710–84). But the style of the extant structures is different from most other Nara works and shows a number of features that clearly belong to the Asuka era (552–710). These include marked entasis (a slight convexity) on the columns as well as cloud-pattern bracket arms supporting the eaves (fig. 2). The style also incorporates a thin block plate (*sarato*) between the tops of the columns and the main bearing block (*daito*) supporting the bracketing (visible in the corridor in the foreground of fig. 2). Also indicative of the "Asuka style" are the stylized Buddhist swastika pattern in the ornamental railings (fig. 2) and the inverted V-shaped struts beneath them (see fig. 65).

The four oldest Hōryūji structures mentioned above incorporate these Asuka-period elements. Though the present corridor connects the Sutra Repository (Kyōzō), Belfry (Shurō), and Lecture Hall (Kōdō) at the north of the Golden Hall and pagoda, these three structures were originally outside



1. Five-story Pagoda, Hōryūji



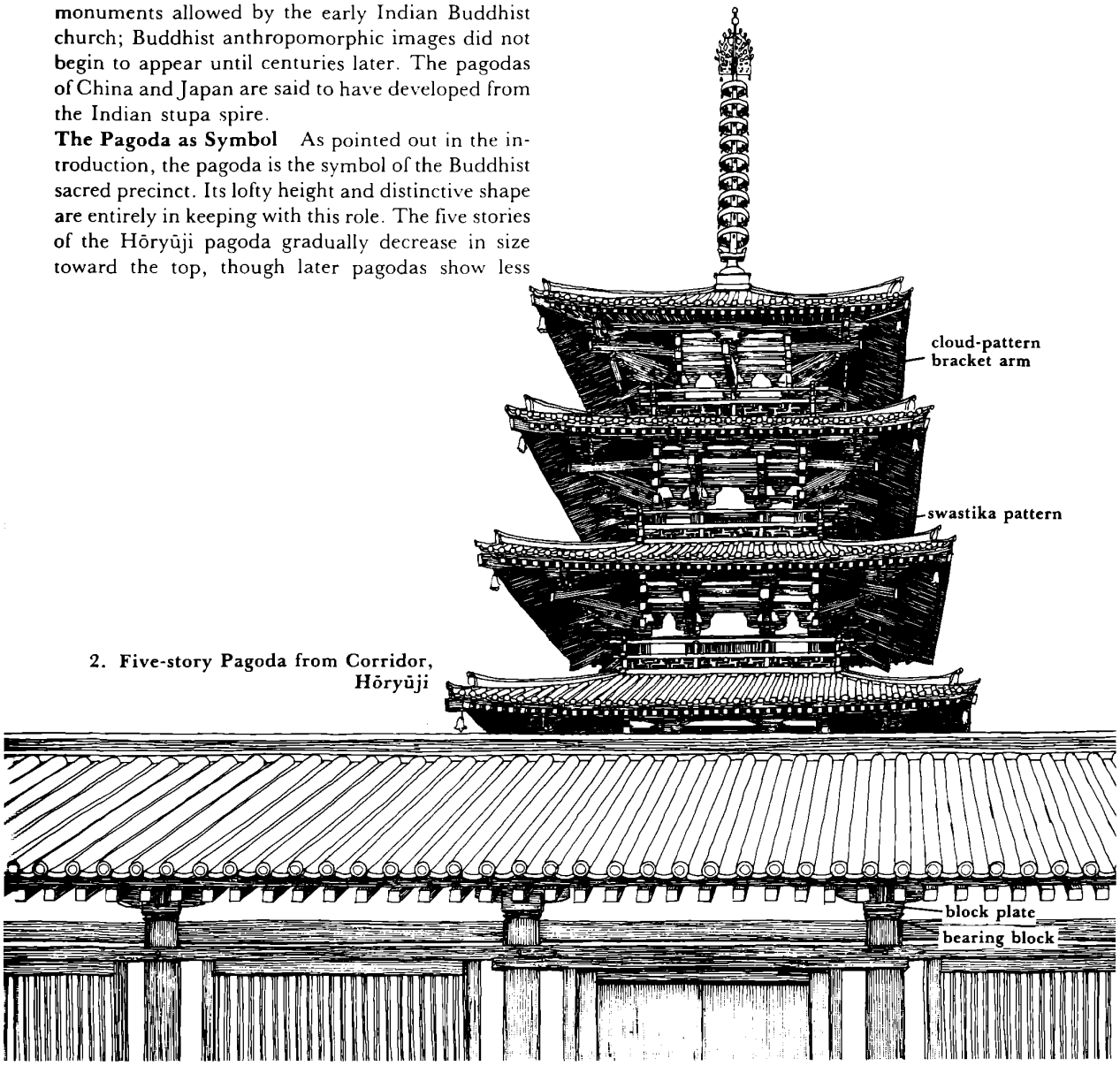
of what was then a perfectly rectangular enclosure (see fig. 7).

Origins of the Pagoda The pagoda enshrines symbolic relics of the Buddha, and the golden hall houses his image. Running through the center of the pagoda from uppermost roof to base is a single massive column that rests on a foundation stone, beneath which are interred the relics which represent the bones of the historical Buddha.

The prototype of the Japanese pagoda is the Indian stupa, a hemisphere of stone and earth with an umbrella-shaped spire above, built for the same purpose of venerating the relics of the Buddha. These relics and the stupa housing them were the only monuments allowed by the early Indian Buddhist church; Buddhist anthropomorphic images did not begin to appear until centuries later. The pagodas of China and Japan are said to have developed from the Indian stupa spire.

The Pagoda as Symbol As pointed out in the introduction, the pagoda is the symbol of the Buddhist sacred precinct. Its lofty height and distinctive shape are entirely in keeping with this role. The five stories of the Hōryūji pagoda gradually decrease in size toward the top, though later pagodas show less diminution, with some seeming nearly straight from top to bottom. Indeed, the Hōryūji pagoda has the most marked diminution of any extant example, giving it a sense of great stability.

But though the pagoda, as reliquary, was the central structure of the monastic compound in the early years of Japanese Buddhism, it gradually relinquished its primary position as Buddhist images and the golden hall housing them gained in importance. The pagoda became in consequence more ornamental than functional, as suggested by the appearance of temples such as Yakushiji and Tōdaiji, where two pagodas were built in front of a central image hall (see figs. 3, 8, 10).



2. Five-story Pagoda from Corridor, Hōryūji