A Pictorial History of Chinese Architecture: A Study of the Development of Its Structural System and the Evolution of Its Types

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Liang Ssu-ch'eng (1901-1972) was a pioneer in the scientific study of Chinese architectural history. He virtually created this field in China, and most of its current practitioners are his students. The book, which he wrote in English for a Western public and originally intended to publish in the 1940s, provides a rare record and analysis of temples, pagodas, tombs, bridges, and imperial palaces that are China's architectural heritage. It is a record that could not be duplicated today because a number of the structures have since been altered or demolished.

With his co-workers, Liang combed the countryside for ancient buildings which he photographed with his Leica camera and recorded in large, detailed architectural drawings of plans, elevations, and cross-sections. These drawings are a text in themselves. Bearing captions in Chinese and English, they teach fundamental lessons about the anatomy of Chinese structures.

Liang's account covers the origin of Chinese architecture and its two surviving basic handbooks from the 12th and 18th centuries; architecture of the pre-Buddhist period; cave temples; buildings in wood traced through several periods of stylistic development from c. 850 to 1911; Buddhist pagodas (most of the surviving pagodas are masonry structures) from simple square plans to those that are multi-storied and eaved; and other masonry structures such as tombs, vaulted buildings, bridges; terraces; and gateways.

For most of his life, Liang Ssu-ch'eng lived in China, but as a young man he received his architectural training at the University of Pennsylvania. Wilma and John K. Fairbank first met him in China in 1932. During his last visit to the United States, in 1947 as a Visiting Professor at Yale, Mrs. Fairbank agreed to edit his manuscript and to help him find an American publisher. However, a combination of political and personal circumstances, compounded by the loss of the original drawings and photographs (they were only rediscovered in 1980) made publication of this unusual project impossible until now.

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