

Preface

MY INTRODUCTION TO LIAO architecture was not remarkable. Like most graduate students of East Asian art since the 1940s, at some point during my first year of graduate school (in my case 1974), I came across the two volumes of plates entitled *Ryō-Kin jidai no kenchiku to sono Butsuzō* (Liao-Jin period architecture and its sculpture) and the two-volume *Tombs and Mural Paintings: Ch'ing-ling* while looking for something else in the folio stacks of the library. Every one of the wooden halls and brick pagodas and each of the reconstituted wall paintings pictured in these books seemed intrinsically interesting. Yet neither the buildings nor the

tombs came up in lectures or seminars or associated readings.

In the twenty years that have passed since that initial encounter, countless new monuments from every province and region, and every time period, have led to reevaluation and rewriting of the history of Chinese art. Liao (947–1125) architecture, wall paintings, and artifacts have been as numerous as those of any other period. Still, Liao material rarely finds a place even in the post-1980s history of Chinese art.

There are reasons for the lacuna. Ever since the collapse of the Liao dynasty in 1125 there have been

obstacles to its study. Liao is the first of three dynasties who ruled in China in succession between the tenth century and 1368 that often are referred to in the West as “conquest dynasties” and in China as “barbarian dynasties.” Either name marks the separation of these groups from the perceived mainstream of Chinese civilization. In China, in addition, the shame of foreign occupation in the tenth through fourteenth centuries is underscored by the fact that the eastern half of Liao territory was that part of the Asian continent from which the non-Chinese Manchu dynasty known as Qing (1644–1911) emerged. Furthermore, materials concerning the homeland of the last non-Chinese dynasty—the geographic region known in the first half of this century as Manchuria—have been most extensively studied and published by Japanese scholars during the occupation in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus it became not just unpopular, but unpatriotic, to conduct research on any material (tenth to fourteenth century or seventeenth to nineteenth century) that had first come to light through these Japanese archaeological teams.

It was not until 1986 that I entered a Liao building. Again my introduction was the standard one for an art historian of China: I visited Datong where I saw what remained at the Huayan and Shanhua monasteries. The Liao-period sutra library and two main halls were splendid—yet seen just a day after my first experience at the rock-cut caves of Yun’gang, and the same day I saw Sima Jinlong’s fifth-century lacquer screen, I did not leave Datong with an urge to write a book about Liao architecture. From Datong I went on to Ying county, and it was there, as I walked along the outer and inner rings of columns of the various levels of the nearly 70-meter-high timber pagoda, that I began to think about what must have been required to put this building or those from Datong together and what it might have meant for them to stand along China’s

“barbarian-occupied” northern fringe in the eleventh century. I also sought some kind of link between what I had seen at Datong and what was in front of me, for the timber pagoda had been erected less than twenty years after the sutra library and only 85 kilometers to the south.

There were, of course, other motivations for writing this book. One was a research interest in Chinese architecture in general. In the fall of 1986 I began to reread the secondary Chinese literature about Liao architecture. This literature comprised two main groups. The earlier works were written mainly in the 1930s by a newly formed Society for Research in Chinese Architecture whose membership was primarily Western- and Japanese-trained architects who became China’s first architectural historians. The later literature has been written after 1949—after the dispersal of the society—by some of the society’s members and, by the 1980s and 1990s, by their Chinese students. Having seen several Liao buildings by the time I began reading, I felt it was fitting that a Liao-period pavilion and gate were the subjects of the first monograph on Chinese architecture. In this article of 1932 and those of the next decade about Liao structures I came across statements like “I felt the aura of somberness and grandeur” [as I stood before a Liao building]; or “I was moved by the power of the architecture”; or “artistically, this is the best building in China.” Such had been my own feelings when I stood in front of the same buildings, and I was gratified to find similar personal sentiments in print. I determined at that point to figure out why the wooden buildings of non-Chinese patronage in northeastern China had elicited such remarks.

The next summer, 1987, I returned to China and followed the 1930s itineraries of several members of the Society for Research in Chinese Architecture. They had sought the old buildings that survived among those named in local records; I sought to de-

termine how the Liao buildings they had first described had fared a half-century of war and political turmoil. It was on the same trip that I first saw a temple complex of Song, the Chinese dynasty contemporary to Liao to its south. This experience convinced me that the unique contribution of Liao to Chinese architecture could only be understood through a discussion of the general issues of tenth-through twelfth-century Chinese architecture. That period's architecture, and the wooden architecture of the non-Chinese Jin dynasty (1125–1234) that succeeded Liao, became the parameters of timber-frame architecture discussed in the first part of this book.

In 1989 I began to explore the Liao funerary tradition. It was through my research on tombs and tomb decoration that I came to understand, as I explain in Parts Two and Three of this book, important purposes of Liao timber architecture. Thus a book that began as a monograph on fourteen wooden halls, and grew to a study of Chinese architecture from the tenth through thirteenth centuries, has come to include funerary architecture as well.

It was not until 1992 and 1993 that I received permission to see Liao architecture in Inner Mongolia and Liaoning. By the summer of 1993 I had seen all but one of the nine extant Liao wooden buildings and twenty-odd brick pagodas. I had walked in all sixteen *zhou* (prefectures) of North China that were Liao's at the zenith of their empire; I had stood in their "ancestral *zhou*" and had touched pieces of the outer walls or other ruins at all five Liao capitals; and I had seen numerous Liao treasures in the museums of prefectures and towns of Inner Mongolia and Liaoning. The monuments and objects, especially against the backdrop of the Mongolian grasslands, have not ceased to make me wonder about the circumstances of their construction by seminomads in the tenth, or eleventh, or twelfth century. Through the years of research and writing, it

has remained the inherent visual power of the monuments and my own curiosity about their makers, Qidan tribesmen who confederated into the Liao empire, that have made every day of this study rewarding.

My next motivation for writing this book was my previous research experience. Few art historians or sinologists begin as Liao specialists. I am no exception. Like others, I have moved from the study of one seminomadic conquest dynasty to another. In my case, the move was back several centuries from research on the art and architecture of the thirteenth-to-fourteenth-century Mongols. Although the territory of China and North Asia where Liao wooden buildings survive is smaller than the scope of the Mongolian empire, the study of Liao architecture was more challenging to initiate. The Liao period offers no counterparts to Marco Polo and Friars William of Rubruck or Odoric of Pordenone whose Western-style descriptions of the life and architectural spaces of the Mongols have led scholars into the Yuan period. Writings about the Liao come primarily from Song Chinese scholars. No portraits of Liao khans hang in museums. There is neither an Inner nor Outer Qidania where one can be certain to meet descendants of the Liao khans. No university courses are offered in the language of the Qidan. In fact, although the Liao wrote with two scripts, neither has been completely deciphered. The Mongols were important to this study, however—not only because aspects of the acculturation of that seminomadic group, including their use of architecture, in the process of empire formation could be informative in the study of the Liao, but also because the majority of the Liao empire eventually fell to the Mongols and much of the Liao portion of the Mongolian empire eventually fell to the Manchus. Thus, in some cases, Liao buildings have been preserved in Mongolian or Manchu packaging.

In some ways the study of Liao buildings has more to offer than that of their Mongolian counterparts. Whereas to this day no burial site of a Mongolian emperor of China and only about twenty non-imperial Yuan-period tombs have been excavated, the tomb sites of all but the last Liao emperor are known, as are those of members of the imperial consort clan. Excavated nonimperial Liao tombs number close to 300, more than 40 with wall paintings. Of this huge group, no single plan is standard and the mural programs are as complex as any subterranean ones known from Chinese tombs.

My final motivation for writing this book was the nature of the documentation about Liao buildings. The timber buildings exhibit a range of wooden joinery techniques: some are the only extant examples of a type described in an architectural treatise; many are examples of the most eminent standards the Chinese building tradition offers. The literary documentation has included primarily stele inscriptions and descriptions in local records. Through them, detailed histories of the buildings and their patrons in this seemingly remote part of Asia have come to life.

Research for this book, especially the site-by-site trips to the eastern and western Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and through Liaoning, was expensive. Without generous support from the following organizations neither the trips nor the writing could ever have been accomplished. I thank the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Getty Grant Program, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, the Asian Cultural Council, and the Research Foundation of the University of Pennsylvania for funding specific components of this project between 1987 and 1996.

Since I became interested in the Liao in the mid-1980s, Denis Twitchett, Frederick Mote, Marilyn L.

Gridley, and Hok-lam Chan have willingly answered questions and been gracious sounding boards for my thoughts. Professors Mote, Gridley, and Chan, as well as Victor Mair and Tracy Miller, have read this manuscript at different stages. Their contributions are indicated throughout the notes. A grant from the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies that was matched by the School of Arts and Sciences made it possible for the University of Pennsylvania to have a Liao Seminar during the spring semester of 1992. Participants in that seminar, Denis Twitchett, Morris Rossabi, Yvgeni Lubo-Lesnichenko, Pamela K. Crossley, and Marilyn L. Gridley, were influential stimuli for this work. So too were discussions about Liao architecture with the late Alexander Soper and with Lothar Ledderöse. Chinese colleagues have been a continuous source of help in China—not only through correspondence but also, occasionally, by sending me a copy of a publication so obscure that I had no hope of getting it in the United States. Among the many who have helped I thank, in particular, Xu Pingfang and Ying Zhaojin and, in Japan, Tanaka Tan. In addition, I am ever grateful to the numerous drivers, local guides, monks, and villagers who led me across farmland and grassland, opened local museums, and gave me permission to photograph.

From the beginning of this project, I was determined to include an extensive photographic record of Liao architecture and related material. The laborious task of transforming my slides and photographs from a variety of sources, some of them of very poor quality, into their present form was accomplished by H. Fred Schoch and Francine Sarin of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania. I thank them for their continued willingness to reshoot and reprint and for their good cheer. At the University of Hawai'i Press, I am grateful for the production help, including some tedious layout work, that brought this book to

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The first summer I saw Liao architecture I was

the mother of two preschoolers. By the time I wrote the last page of this manuscript I had one child in middle school, two in elementary school, and an infant. Each research trip, and each night or weekend I worked, required sacrifice on their parts. Without that sacrifice, without Paul's taking time from his work so that I could do mine, and without my parents' continued willingness to be here while I was in Asia, all that follows could not have been finished.

