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San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

The Peace Pagoda - Its Beauty and Its Spirit

by

Yoshiro Taniguchi, Architect

The Peace Pagoda to be placed in the inner court of the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center in San Francisco has been designed as a proper symbol of Japanese interpretation of the time-honored beauty and, at the same time, as a monumental expression of the real heart of the Japanese people, who sincerely aspire to good understanding with the people of the United States.

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Local background of ^{the} Pagoda

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religion, salubrious climate, the subtle craftsmanship of the people and rich

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The Peace Pagoda to be placed in the inner court of the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center in San Francisco has been designed as a proper symbol of Japanese interpretation of the time-honored beauty and, at the same time, as a monumental expression of the real heart of the Japanese people, who sincerely aspire to the firm friendship and good understanding with the people of the United States.

The Japanese designer of this Pagoda, Architect Yoshiro Taniguchi, while delving into its unique plan, tried to give ^{special} (active) attention to the historical significance which lies behind this structure.

1. The spirit and historical background ^{the} of ₁ Pagoda

The first construction of the Pagoda in Japan dated ⁵ back to the seventh century; and during its long history extending over 1,300 years, the style of this religious tower has attained its characteristic grace and refinement in the fundamental design and the details. The Japanese pagodas were originally intended to symbolize the sense of beauty peculiar to this country and also to give expression to the psychological inner reality of our urge to "Prayer" common to the whole ^{of} mankind. The happy combination of Japan's proclivity ^{for} _{to} religion, salubrious climate, the subtle craftsmanship of the people and rich materials easily accessible to them, predestined the gradual development and the ultimate consummation of the Pagoda.

The detailed structure itself, as a matter of fact, has experienced a lot of vicissitudes in its long chronicle. Geographical proximity to the Chinese mainland made it almost inevitable, at a certain period, that the sacred tower



in Japan ^{fell} ~~was~~ under the direct influence of China's idiosyncrasy, so much so that some pagodas proved nothing but the abject duplications of the edifices in Chinese dynasties. This trend ^{deteriorated to} ~~reduced the state of~~ a flashy outlook and gawdy flavor, having nothing to do with the original understanding of ^{the} beauty in simplicity. There began to be a growing consciousness in Japan, however, of the worth of her own culture and the people finally succeeded in sublimate^g ~~ing the~~ product of ~~the~~ real assimilation.

The Peace Pagoda in San Francisco is seriously expected to preserve its pristine glory in the design, which is to lay emphasis on the pure quintessence of Japanese artistic quality. I, as the designer of this Pagoda, hope sincerely that the structure ^{will} ~~(would)~~ have a congenial appeal to the mind of the American people, inasmuch as the essential spirit of this Pagoda consists in the inmost "Prayer" of human beings to the Infinite. The Supreme Existence above us is sure to perform the sacred mission of creating integral peace and harmony by giving her final touch to the top of the Pagoda pointing to Heaven.

2. The style and order of the Peace Pagoda

The Peace Pagoda lifts up its hundred-foot-high spire to the skies of California. It presents a magnificent view to all esthetically minded people who raise their eyes up to the horizon ^{on} ~~at~~ the perimeters of San Francisco.

The five roofs of the Pagoda are of the round type instead of ^{the} usual square shape; and in proportion to the increased height of each storey, ^{the} roofs are designed to become smaller in their size. ^{The} cylindrical construction of the tower-body ^{will} ~~(might)~~ contribute to the sense of stable equilibrium.

The most important part of a pagoda is the "Kurin", or nine ringed spire placed on the topmost roof, which is intended to designate the highest virtue; and every part of the pagoda below "Kurin" is to serve as a ^{base} ~~(stand)~~ of this spire.

These rings are made of bronze gilded with gold on the surface. And the "Kurin" is given the proper balance by an ornamental ball with ~~the~~^a flaming head named "Hoshu" as ~~the~~ weight for pressing and arranging the rings in good order.

Contrary to the regular style of the Oriental pagoda which is mostly square or octagonal in its plane, I, the designer of the Peace Pagoda, had a preference for the cylindrical plane, which was devised in ~~the~~ ancient Japan of the eighth century (Nara Period). That era (^{saw} attained) the culmination of Japan's intrinsic culture; ~~the~~^a brilliant civilization flourished and prospered there. Nara was made the capital in 710 A.D. and remained as such until about 780 A.D., covering ^{the} reigns of seven successive Emperors. In 770 A.D., Empress Koken was so pious as to contribute each a hundred thousand miniature pagodas, not more than a foot high each, to each of ten grand temples designated as the representative spiritual strongholds for her subjects; so that the total number of these cylindrical pagodas donated by her reached as many as a million. Therefore they were commonly (^{named} nominated) "Hyakuman-to", that is the Million Pagoda.

They showed such a graceful and exquisite quality with their five or three storied round roofs that those religious pagodas marked a new epoch in the history of Japanese formative art. What heightened the value of this type of pagoda is the fact that the scrolls of Buddhist scripture enshrined in this were the oldest printed document in the world, which, for students of Oriental history, provides a vital clue to the investigation of ancient Japan.

This Empress's act of religious contribution was ascribable to her heartiest wishes that the world, though confined to her own domain, (^{should} would) remain guided



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by the absolute principle of "Peace" for ever and ever to come. "Prayer for Eternal Peace of the World" - this used to be the prevailing cult among the Japanese forefathers. This rigorous principle should not be toned down ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ any age.

The "Hyakuman-to" retains ~~the~~ ^a high artistic value and religious prominence as well as ~~the~~ historical significance. It is only to be regretted that the pagoda of this style in its pristine form has not been bequeathed to ~~the~~ posterity. But the original spirit must be always alive; and we should endeavor to enliven it.

Beside the urge ^{to} ~~of~~ ^e ~~ing~~ something substantial which every artist aspires to, I, designer of this Pagoda, hope that the project of this unique structure ^{will} ~~(would)~~ cultivate ~~the~~ friendship and mutual understanding between two nations on both sides of the Pacific.

Needless to say, the new Pagoda is far from the mere replica of the ancestral device of many centuries ago; it is intended to make ~~the~~ full use of the advanced architectural technique so that it would be enjoyed by ~~the~~ contemporary people equipped with ^a ~~the~~ modern sense to appreciate the architecture in its true light.

The color of the nine-ringed spire and the decorative weight over it on the topmost roof is gold. Each roof is covered with copper plates on its surface, which is tinged with antique looking green-rust. The body of the Pagoda is of the tuned harmony of white and black.

^{The} interior walls on the first storey are set with resplendent shells, the mother-of-pearl. And in the center of this storey is placed a symbolic image of Peace which is studded with Japanese cultured pearls.

A glance must be cast to the clear pool on the foot of this Pagoda. The pool is of the singular form which is named "Zen-po Ko-en" in Japan. The literal translation of this word is "Square-front and Circular-rear shape".

The front half of the pool is of ~~the~~ square design which is connected with ^a round contour in the rear. The idea of this geometrical figure was given from the typical shape of the old burial mounds dedicated to the deceased nobles in the fifth or sixth century. Both figures of the square and circle are ~~very~~ harmoniously arranged. Some of these tombs with the mound consecrated to the ancient Emperors are several times as spacious as the largest Pyramid of Pharaoh, Egypt. The perimeters of the mound are usually bordered by a moat. The whole contour of the figure presents a geometrical combination of straight and curved lines. The advent of the Japanese historical figure in the heart of the modern city of San Francisco will be sure to make some impressions ^{on} ~~to~~ the people who visit there and even ^{on} ~~to~~ those who are on the side of the Avantgarde art. The Pagoda will be beautifully reflected ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ the clear water of the pool; and as night draws on, the whole structure will look extremely picturesque with the illumination shedding its soft light on the Pagoda. It looks as if the Pagoda is carved in relief against the nocturnal sky and floating on water in a fairy land.

I should be very happy if I could successfully transplant the authentic "Shibui" flavor of Japanese historical monument on the soil of San Francisco.

5. Harmonious blending with the surroundings

~~X~~ Serious consideration is to be given to the desirable harmony and match of the Pagoda with the surrounding construction in the same area, where Mr. Minoru Yamasaki, one of the most illustrious architects of the United States, arranges and builds the unique houses in accordance with the

Redevelopment of San Francisco. His unrivaled design is characterized by the dexterous composition of the straight linear pieces of framework of ~~the~~ precast concrete, ^{which} ~~by~~ ^{es} applying the supreme technique developed in the United States. The attractiveness in the mellow simplicity as well as the clear-cut and forcible approach ^{of} ~~in~~ his designing ^{has} ~~(might have)~~ something in common with the inherent traits of Japanese architecture. To this is to be added, a cubic arrangement is seen with the different height of each and every building perfectly adjusted to the atmosphere in the space there.

The cylindrical form of the Pagoda will have its place in the midst of linear straight erections of Mr. Minoru Yamasaki, shimming in with each other by creating an agreeable contrast between rectilinear and circular figures. This combination shows the modernized arrangement of "Zen-po Ko-en" shape. The elevation plus the symmetrical shape of the Pagoda should be considered, too, in view of the hand-in-glove cooperation between the artists of two countries of different trends and traditions, so that the United States ^{may} ~~give~~ full scope to their own technique and imagination, whereas Japan expresses herself to the fullest extent. And then the perfect concord must be attained there. The inner garden itself is strewn with sand, gravels and rocks in aesthetic arrangement to visualize the metaphysical spirit of the "Zen". I hope the Japanese Pagoda and American edifices would produce something like a poetical euphony in their accomplished images. As these buildings will be constructed on a gentle slope in the central part of the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center, they can be seen from a long way off and will add some accentuated variety to the rich views of San Francisco.

4. Technical collaboration

The Peace Pagoda is of reinforced concrete structure. The body of it is

to be cast by the sliding-form system in the site ^{is} ~~of~~ San Francisco. The pieces of framework of precast concrete are to be attached to each layer as the corresponding roof. The whole surface of the Pagoda is equipped with various sorts of finishing and decorative materials which ^{will be} ~~(have been)~~ shipped from Japan. Those materials include metal and wooden works and fabrics refined up for more than a thousand years in our history of fine arts and also the advanced estheticism and handicrafts of ~~the~~ contemporary times. The stones and rocks to be arranged in the pool and the inner court are to be sent from Japan.

The Peace Pagoda is, thus, the very product of ~~the~~ technical cooperation between the United States of America and Japan concerning the constructive formula, building materials and decorative patterns of both countries.

5. Conclusion

The Peace Pagoda is the cream of architectural beauty attained by the sincerity and painstaking effort of our predecessors. The sublimated grace with its historical significance will strike a responsive chord in ^{the} hearts of those who lift up their eyes to this Pagoda.

I, as the designer of the Peace Pagoda, would feel more than happy if I could convey the good will and friendship of the Japanese to the citizens of the United States by means of my architectural designing.

May the Peace Pagoda represent our heartiest wishes to deepen the mutual understanding and collaboration of cultural, social and economic relationships between us!

May 10, 1963

