



**SEVEN-PAGODA** Temple rubbings of the stone carvings of five hundred arhats / [foreword: Shi Kokkwong ; preface: Shi Kexiang ; a brief introduction to the five: Chun Mengsiu, Li Shusheng, Shi Chengfeng] [China] : Seven Pagoda Temple, 2002]

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SEVEN-PAGODA TEMPLE  
RUBBINGS OF  
THE STONE CARVINGS  
OF  
FIVE HUNDRED  
ARHATS

陝西旅游出版社



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# FOREWORD

Shi Kokkwong

Qita Temple, or Seven Pagoda Temple, in Ningbo, with its one-thousand-year history, is partly known for the rarity of Stone Carvings of Five Hundred Arhats, which it has treasured for a long time and is now inlaid on the inside walls of the Hall of Yuantong. Visitors cannot but be strongly impressed by the various kinds of artistic images, the charms of Buddhist culture.

Arhats, or Lohan, are Buddhist sages who have achieved complete freedom from the bondage of birth and death and attained nirvana. They are frequently referred to in sutras, for instance, in “Fahua Sutra” there is a whole chapter devoted to “Record of 500 Disciples Present at Sakyamuni’s Sermons”. It is said that traces of the 500 arhats could be detected in Tiantai Mountain, though, regrettably, not by mortal human eyes.

Here is a brief account of the origin of the stone carvings of 500 arhats at Qita Temple. It dates back to the third year of the Jiaqing reign of the Qing dynasty when Hu Guanlan, the Governor of Changzhou County, Jiangsu Province, and the Abbot of Tianning Temple in Changzhou, were determined to have the 500 arhats engraved. Their joint efforts finally brought the stone carvings of the 500 arhats into existence. According to the *Introduction* there, these stone carvings were copied from the sculptures of 500 arhats at Jingci Temple in Hangzhou, which first appeared in the Song dynasty. The stone carvings at Qita Temple in Ningbo were made on the basis of the rubbings of the Changzhou engraved figures.

The sculptures of 500 arhats at Jingci Temple in Hangzhou were lost in the course of time. Fortunately, the carvings of the 500 arhats of Tianning Temple were reproduced from their rubbings on the walls of a temple in Guilin, Guangxi and of Zhusheng Temple in Nanyue, Hunan. In 1890 during the Guangxu reign of the Qing dynasty, the Venerable Master Ciyun from Hunan, then in charge of Qita Temple, decided to have the Grand Hall renovated, and the images of the 500 arhats engraved on its inside walls. After many setbacks, the Master finally had Master Xinyue of Zhusheng Temple engrave the figures from the old rubbings and Master of Zen, Mo’an, from Nanyue write the *Foreword*. The work began in 1894, and came to completion in 1896. The result was a set of stone carvings made up of 250 stelas, each 0.35 meters in width and 0.30





meters in length, carved with the images of two arhats and their names, and also the names of donors.

The stone engravings of 500 arhats at Qita Temple were done by painting the figures from the rubbings on the stone surface with a fine Chinese brush first and then engraving the figures by tracing the fine lines. The lines were so fine that the work seemed to be a brush painting rather than a carving. Liu Quanzhi of the Qing dynasty wrote in praise of the artistic work: "Here is the work of 500 arhats, each with his own facial expression, showing little of their holiness, renowned across time and space, full of magic power, changeable and ever changing, different in gestures and outlook, knowing this and the nether world; some lean, some tall, some fair and clear, some old and senile, some showing dignity, some at play, conveying a variety of meanings — all showing their brilliance." Closely viewing the work, one cannot help marvelling at its charms.

It is most fortunate that this cultural treasure survived the Cultural Revolution. This survival not only lends glory to the ancient temple, but also means a blessing in the history of Chinese culture. Abbot Kexiang has made an extraordinary contribution to the publication of this album of stone carvings of 500 arhats, which is a rare combination of wisdom and art, so that more people will be able to come to appreciate the traditional Buddhist culture of China. The credit should go to him and his laudable enthusiasm and devotion has moved me so much that I decide to write this foreword as my support to the publication.



# PREFACE

Shi Kexiang

Buddhist relics, as an important part of cultural heritage of China, have played an irreplaceable role in delivering messages of history. It is universally acknowledged that the relics are rich and profound in meaning. Careful protection of the cultural relics makes it possible not only to provide researchers in literature, history and art with important information but also remind Chinese people of the past brilliance so that they go on to achieve an even greater brilliance that our posterity will take pride in.

In the treasury at Qita Temple there is a set of Stone Carvings of Five Hundred Arhats of the Qing dynasty, which is the only set that is kept intact in China and is of high artistic quality. The set is recognized as a national treasure, highly commended by researchers in art history and in archaeology.

The publication of the Rubbings of Stone Carvings of 500 Arhats is an important event in the history of Buddhist culture, whether in view of history or of art. It has long been our intention to do this, but because of absence of necessary conditions, the project did not get started. To enrich my knowledge in the publication of albums of cultural relics so that I may be able to bring this project to a successful completion, I have read a large number of relevant materials. In the course of my study, I have met with difficulty and indifference, but when I look at the nicely-made beautiful rubbings of the carvings, I invariably come to realize the staunch spirit that Master Ciyun and my master Yuexi showed in face of difficulties in protecting this treasure. So I feel it my obligation and responsibility to present this Buddhist work of art to the world. A friend of mine has directed my attention to Mr. Qin Mengxiao in Hong Kong, who often writes articles on Buddhist relics and other essays and reports about Buddhism in China. He is so knowledgeable, I ask myself why I don't turn to him for advice. At this suggestion I began to see what I should do. Soon I went to Hong Kong to visit Mr. Qin and when I told him what I intended to do, he was delighted, and offered to be the editor-in-chief of this album so that he could work with complete devotion for the success of this project.

The restoration and promotion of Buddhist culture is a long-term mission. What I myself can do for the Buddhist culture is almost nothing, comparable to a drop of water in an ocean. However, I am convinced that a single flower may be suggestive of a world, and a single leaf may be indicative of a Buddha. We hope that with this common



aim in view Buddhists will join hands with people of insight so that every endeavour will be successful and whatever we do will be brought to fruition. Let's pray for the enhancement of Buddhist culture, for the popularity of Buddhist truth in the country and in the world, and for world peace and the happiness and prosperity of the people.







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