



Fig. 18. In front of Ta-fo-ssu

Forty-one steps led up to another courtyard surrounded by temples, pavilions and pagodas in both Chinese and Tibetan style, some surrounded by balustrades of fretted white marble in lovely patterns, each vertical post being surmounted by a tall knob. From this courtyard one could not glance in any direction without being delighted with the most beautiful and satisfying architectural perspectives, the most imposing being that provided by the main temple, a massive building of reddish-brown wood with five roofs, the whole resting on a stone terrace to which three flights of steps with marble balustrades led from the courtyard. The centre flight was divided by an inclined stone slope of white marble with an artistically carved dragon in high relief.

Inside the temple two galleries ran all round the walls. Though it was by no means small, it was filled by the gigantic group of gods who had their home there. In the middle, towering up as far as the topmost roof, was the great Avalokiteçvara, said to be twenty-two meters high. It was of wood, glittering with gold and bright colours. On either side stood smaller figures. When we had mounted two storeys and reached the first gallery we were only on a level with the navel of this gigantic image, and its head, sharply foreshortened, disappeared in the higher