

## No. 23 Climbing to Enjoy the Fragrance of the Garden of Good Cheer

Mount Hui lies to the west of Wuxi county in Jiangsu province, with nine peaks above and nine glens below. The temple stands on the eastern foothills. To the right of the temple is the spring where Lu Yu of the Tang dynasty once tasted the water and judged it to be the second best in the Empire.<sup>1</sup> The spring is paved with stone, and adjacent to it are two ponds, one square and one round in form, each sheltered by a pavilion.

During Emperor Kangxi's tour of the south, His Majesty kindled a fire in the Bamboo Stove preserved in this temple by Brother Xinghai, and boiled water from the spring to make tea. This event made the spring even more famous.

The Qin family garden, which is on the same hill, to the left, was originally a monastery; it was called Southern Hermitage, and then Abode of Profuse Fragrance. It was acquired by a President of one of the Six Ministries in the Ming dynasty, Qin Jin, who made it into a garden and named it Traveller's Lodge in Phoenix Valley. His descendants enlarged it and beautified it from one generation to the next and gave it a new name—the Garden of Good Cheer. In the reigns of Kangxi and Qianlong, the garden was several times honoured by the Imperial presence.

An isolated hill stands above the garden, which used to be called Hill of Beauty, until one of Their Majesties graciously bestowed upon it the title Solitary Eminence.

In the middle of the ninth month, when the moon was full, I went to the house of my aunt, Madame Gu (my mother's sister). My cousin Chungu invited me to go for a ramble on Mount Hui. We sampled the 'second spring in the Empire', and having enjoyed our tea we went on into the Temple and begged the monk to show us the famous bamboo stove. We were informed by the monk that there was an official injunction forbidding its public display. So we continued on our way, proceeding to

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<sup>1</sup>Editor's Note: See *Lu Yu quanji* 陸羽全集, ed. Zhang Hongyong 張宏庸 (Taipei: Chaxue wenxue chubanshe) 1985, p. 47.

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the Garden of Good Cheer. From a distance we could already see the sea of bosky green shade, provided by the almost one thousand ancient trees of the garden, which towered into the sunny sky. And although we were still half a mile from the Garden, we could detect, wafted on the breeze, the heady fragrance of the cassia flowers that were in full bloom before the Hall of Heavenly Fragrance.

As soon as we entered the gate, we saw the Fish Gazebo, with a pond around it, filled with water from the Temple spring, which came

gurgling along a stone channel. Beyond the pond and over a bridge, we reached the Hall of the Lovely Tree.<sup>2</sup> Following a winding path along the slope of the hill, we climbed to the highest spot, where stood the Plum Flower Pavilion, then turning to our right we reached in turn the Hall of the Imperial Brush, the Gallery of Celestial Fragrance, the Nest in the Clouds, the Tower Piercing the Void—but the crag known as Solitary Eminence stood still further south.

The blossoming cassia groves tempted us to stay longer. Attracted by the richness and purity of their fragrance, I plucked a slender spray, and culled a few blades of the grass known as 'domino'—on the back of this grass are little raised yellow dots, just like the dots on dominoes, in all the twenty-one varieties found in a set. The grass is also reputed to have healing properties. It is a rarity, so I took some back with me to my boat.

Upon investigation, I found that the literary name of this Mr Qin was Guosheng, and that he was a *jinshi* and Board President of the late Ming, noted for his suppression of the Yao bandits in Chen county (Hunan province) and in Guangxi.

As to the story of the Nine Elders of the Qin Garden, this refers to the occasion when the members of the Qin family who held official status as students in the Provincial Academy came to the Garden to welcome and do homage to the Emperor Qianlong, when he graciously visited the Garden on one of his Southern Excursions. On that occasion, His Majesty favoured these loyal elders by graciously composing a poem, which contained the following two lines:

Six hundred are the accumulated years  
of the Nine Elders of the Qin family;  
This rare gathering outshines even  
the celebrated assembly of Bo Juyi.

<sup>2</sup>Chinese men of letters had an almost superstitious obsession with the names of their gardens, studios, etc. These often contained literary allusions or quotations from the Classics. The name of this hall is an allusion to a story in the *Zuo Commentary* 左傳, Duke Zhao, second year. But to speak bluntly, this is really otiose.