

### No. 145 Enjoying the Cool in the Lotus Pavilion

In the pond of the Garden of Clear Tranquillity<sup>1</sup> there is a pavilion which catches the first rays of the moon, with a serpentine bridge meandering to the left of it, like a 'thirsty rainbow'—I dubbed it 'companion of the rainbow and catcher of the moon'. Thirty-odd large willow-trees are dotted round the pond at pleasing intervals, and the entire pond is planted with lotuses. It reminds one of the Buddhist Lotus Throne. I composed a 'pillar couplet' as follows:

Green shade on every side is nurtured by the spring;  
Red rain in the pond is a composition in water.

In the hot summer months I always used to bring some volumes of poetry and official documents with me and sit in the pavilion, to soothe away the unrest and purge the impurities of life.

In the summer of the year *bingshen* (1836), when I looked through the archives and found a host of unresolved cases, I decided to set up a schedule for myself—to read and resolve two cases each day. From the summer to the autumn I had succeeded in dispatching 266 such cases, and the same number of cases in the ensuing winter.

Then I found out that the recorded number of documents in the archives did not tally with the actual number of documents deposited there. So I memorialized the Throne about the matter, giving an account of my thorough investigations. Subsequently a certain Censor in the Central Government memorialized the Throne censuring various practices at this office such as the poor standard of construction work, the messy state of the accounts, corruption among members of the staff, the employment of senile and infirm officers, etc, etc. His Majesty appointed Board President Zhu Shiyan<sup>2</sup> to come down to the South to investigate. He arrived in the sixth month of the year *dingyou* (1837) at Qingjiangpu,

<sup>1</sup>The residence of the Director of Southern River Conservancy, at Huai'an, Jiangsu province. (YTH) Linqing was Director of River Conservancy there from 1833 to 1842. (JM)

<sup>2</sup>Native of Jiangsu. Second on the list of successful *jinshi* candidates; posthumously titled as Wending 文定, and admitted to the Temple for the Sagacious and Virtuous 賢良祠. (LQ)

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and called for the relevant documents and accounts to make a thorough-going investigation, as a result of which he rebutted the charges item by item. Then in the eighth month he inspected all the construction works, and memorialized the Throne in the following terms:

He found the works all to be strong and solid. He added that the water was flowing at a smooth rate. The Shen brothers had not been working in the *yamen*. Among the officers, apart from those who were already deceased, and staff who were working without any delinquency, there was only one person who was over seventy years of age, who should have been retired from service. The River Conservancy accounts were in a mess, and the Treasury Intendant should be dishonorably discharged at once. As to the multiplicity and complexity of the accounts items during the period from the eighth year to the sixteenth year, the River Conservancy Director-General had already memorialized the Throne about the thorough investigation being carried out. It was suggested that this matter remain the charge of the Director-General.

The Imperial Rescript indicated His Majesty's approval and acceptance of the memorial.

Then I set up a special bureau and appointed Liu Xiaowu<sup>3</sup> and Wang Jingxuan<sup>4</sup> to do the work of investigating the Treasury accounts, and appointed Prefect Chen Jucheng<sup>5</sup> to be the responsible chief of this special work. The work was not completed until more than one year later. When the final report was presented to the Emperor, His Majesty ordered that it should be sent to the relevant Board for thorough scrutiny.

In the sixth month of the year *wuxu* (1838), I was sitting in the pavilion, when I received a special communication from the Board. Instantly I felt every vulgar dusty feeling vanish. I leant on the balustrade to gaze at the water in the pond, ruffled by a slight breeze, and watched

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<sup>3</sup>Named Mu 穆, native of Jiangsu, a clerk. (LQ)

<sup>4</sup>Named Xiwen 熙文, a student in the Provincial Academy of Jiangsu, later promoted to Prefect. (LQ)

<sup>5</sup>Named Xunwen 勳文, a student in the Zhejiang Provincial Academy. (LQ) The title *Sima*, used by Linqing to describe Chen, was an ancient official title, not used since the Tang dynasty, and employed here by the pseudo-literary stylist to mean either a Prefect or a Sub-Prefect.

the bubbles emerging from below and popping continuously like flying stars chasing each other. My younger daughter Fobao threw some petals into the pond, and they performed a butterfly-dance—the red tumbling and fluttering with the green.

At that time my eldest daughter Miaolianbao, in respectful fulfilment of my mother's wish, had completed the continuation volume to my mother's *Anthology of Women Poets Compiled on Orthodox Principles*, and had also obtained two prefaces to the second volume, one by Aunt Pan Xubai and another by Miss Weng Xiujun. She came to see me with the manuscripts and prefaces for my comments, and as she crossed the bridge with a leisurely step, accompanied by her maid, she pointed to the cranes and the deer, and seemed to breathe in the poetry of the moment.

Now when I recall this scene, I realize how very precious such moments are—and how hard to come by!

