Practising Zen in the Monastery of Purity and Grace

After coming to Hangchow I was unable to adjust to the climate, and became gravely ill with malaria. I moved to the Monastery of Purity and Grace for a period of rest and convalescence. The Prior of that establishment, the Venerable Chu-yun 主雲, a monk of profound religious devotion and learning, one day accosted me: "According to my observation," he said, "your spirit is surpassingly pure, and your illness can be cured. It has indeed been providentially arranged that we should meet one another. Would you care to sit in meditation on the mat?" I answered in the affirmative and was invited to enter the Prior's own room and to sit on the mat facing his. There was incense burning in the censer on the side table, there was holy water in a phial, there was a screen fashioned from rare and beautiful Hunanese bamboo swishing against the floor. There was not a human sound in the place. When first I sat down, I felt intolerably restless and hot, then I felt a shuddering cold; but I observed Chu-yun with his closed eyes and his drooping eyebrows, and his spirit of serene tranquillity had a salutary effect on me. I made an effort to restrain myself for a while and then I too attained deep contemplation.

Then Chu-yun expounded the gatha of "not being subjected to the continuous wheel of transmigration." Suddenly I heard the wind blowing the bamboos against each other, and I attained Zen enlightenment. I hummed an extemporaneous verse:

Best I love this first hill
    south of the Lake,
Seeking the Cloudy Path
    to knock at Zen's Door.
Outside the window vie
    a thousand bamboos forlorn;
When our words went beyond the wheel
    I felt true tranquillity.

The Prior, hearing me recite this verse, was delighted and uplifting his two hands palm to palm[77] he said: "You are hale and well now." Then he rose from the mat and went to the desk to wash his ink-stone, took a brush and did a free-hand ink-painting of South Screen Hill[78] on a fan,[79] as a compliment to me and to my appreciation of his exposition. He also wrote out a prescription for an infusion of boiled ginger and dates, to be taken in lieu of tea, and recommended that I abstain from eating beans. Bidding farewell to the Prior, I returned home and after nursing myself for ten days, I found my malaria completely cured.

On investigation I learned that the monastery where I had stayed was originally named the Monastery of the Ever-bright Enlightening Sun. It was first built in the first year of the Hsien-te Reign of the Chou dynasty of the

[77] (YTH) The customary Buddhist sign of salutation or approval or congratulation.

[78] (Ed) The Monastery is at the foot of this hill.

[79] (YTH) Perhaps it sounds ridiculous and absurd to translate *pien-mien* 便面 ('face convenience') as fan; well, the ridiculous absurdity lies in the then fashionable pseudo-literary style of employing an archaic expression which was once in existence in the 4th century AD.

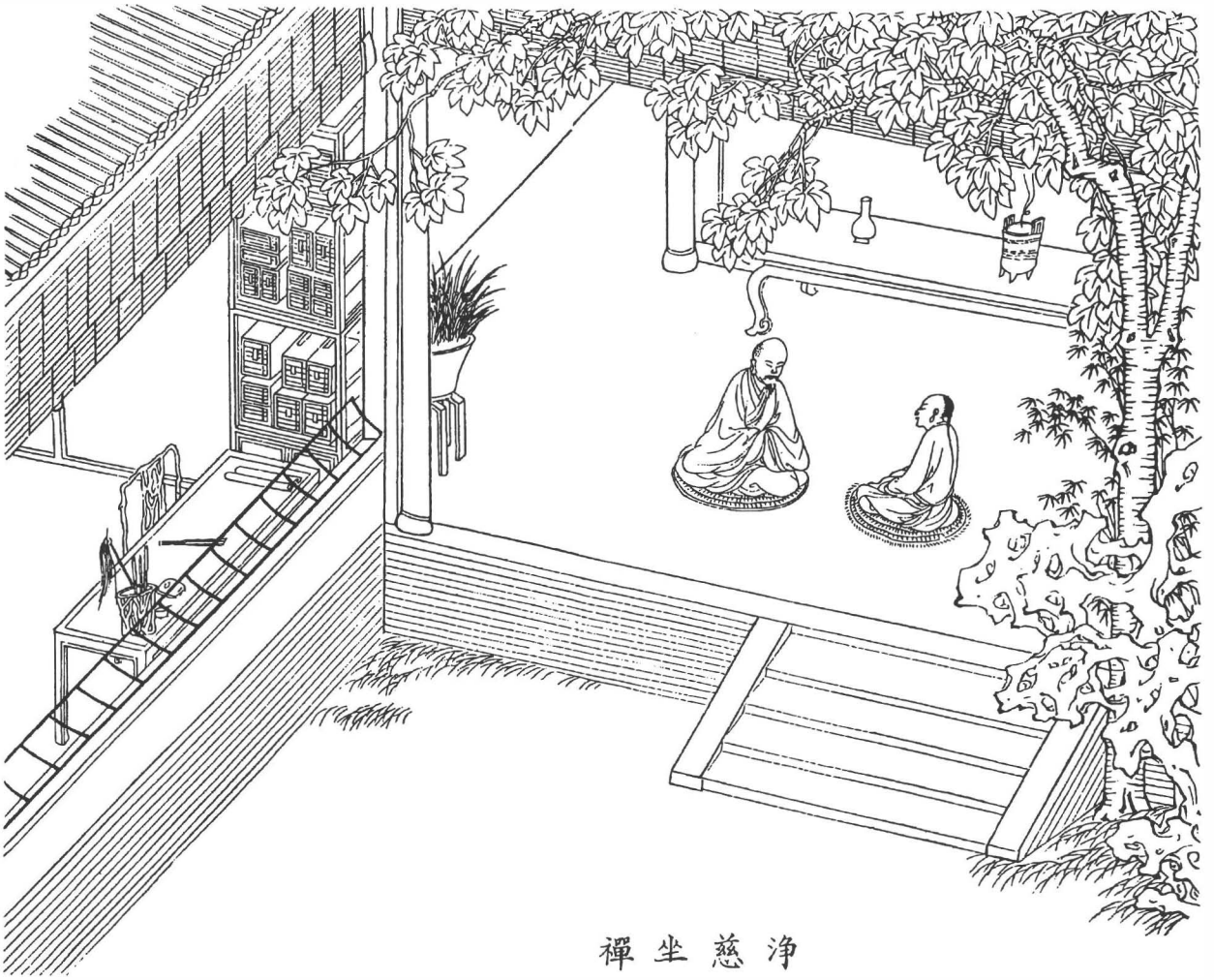
Five Dynasties period [954 AD]. The Prince Ch'ien Shu 錢俶 of the Wu Yueh Kingdom, later posthumously canonised as the Loyal and Exemplary Prince, invited the monk Yen-shou 延壽 to stay there, and it was there that the monk compiled the *Tsung ching lu* 宗鏡錄 in one hundred volumes.[80] In the Sung dynasty, the main hall was burned down, and while the monk Tao-chi 道濟 [81] was soliciting contributions to rebuild it, there occurred a miracle: great timbers floated up from the Temple kitchen well. A second miracle involved a monk who attained Nirvana as soon as he had finished fashioning by hand the figures of five hundred Arhats. A special hall was built to house and worship the five hundred statues and to commemorate this devout monk-artist. At the same time the Priory received its present name. During the Yuan and Ming dynasties it burned down and was rebuilt many times.

In the present dynasty, in the forty-sixth year of the K'ang-hsi Reign [1707], it was renovated, the whole work lasting three years. On its completion, the Emperor himself graciously composed the text for a stele and presented a pair of pillar couplets in his own calligraphy: their splendour complements that of the surrounding lake and hills. Then in the eleventh year of the Yung-cheng Reign [1733] the (long deceased) monk Yen-shou was honoured by special edict with the additional title Perfectly Wise and Enlightened Zen Master, and the Priory was presented (as were other monasteries throughout the Empire) with special reprints of (among others) the *Maxims of the Heart* 心訣, the *Ode on the Heart* 心賦, the *Tsung ching lu* , and the *Wan shan t'ung kuei chi* 萬善同歸集. The Priory was also included in the edict ordering the repair of all Buddhist shrines, the renovation of all statues and the verification of the Buddhistic succession. This further enhanced the renown of the Priory, which has had venerable monks through the generations. Prior Chu-yun's Buddha-name,[82] Chi-hsiang 際祥, testifies that he is a veritable orthodox successor in the Transmission of the Lamp.

[80] (YTH) A work which represents the doctrines of all the three schools of T'ien-t'ai, Hsien-shou and Tz'u-en Buddhism; it contains a long and elaborate discussion with the noted representatives of the three respective schools, and a careful collation of the various sutra texts and their Chinese translations. It has been regarded as a veritable compendium of Buddhism since its first publication in the Yuan-feng (1078–1985) period of the Sung dynasty, and has been a rather popular work. In the Ch'ing dynasty the Yung-cheng Emperor bestowed a eulogistic Preface on this work.

[81] (Ed) The Living Buddha Chi-kung 濟公 of traditional fiction.

[82] (YTH) His 'baptismal' name.



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