

No. 137 Reminiscences of the Past and the Tower of Lyric Incantation

The Reverend Master Jie'an, whose Dharma name is Juchao, and one of whose literary names is Qingheng, was once in charge of instruction at the Mount Jiao Buddhist Seminary. In my youth the fame of three monk-poets reached my ears—Jie'an, Guyan and Liantang. Now both Guyan and Liantang have passed away into Nirvana, and only the octogenarian Jie'an is still alive. He has retreated to the Monastery of the Pure Dharma on Mount Ping. His disciple, Brother Xingyuan, from time to time sent copies of my various poetical compositions, such as 'The Deliverance of the Crocodile', to his master, who would compose verses in response to mine and send them to me the very same day.

On my return trip I went to call on him at Mount Ping. We greeted each other with expressions of mutual regret at the lateness of our encounter. When it was time for me to leave, Jie'an walked with me, leaning on his staff, and saw me off. We passed by the Tower of Lyric Incantation to the west of Lake Baozhang. This tower faces east, and according to legend it was the very place where Su Dongpo composed (i.e. chanted) one of his lyrics to the tune 'West River Moon'. The present building was put up by a local gentleman named Li Zhixun.¹ In the twenty-seventh year of Qianlong (1763), His Majesty graciously visited this building and bestowed upon it its present name. There is an open terrace to the south of the tower, and thence by crossing a bridge you come to the Pavilion of Boundless Vista. Turning west and crossing another little bridge, you come to the Hall of Five Blessings, which is surrounded by mounds of earth. To the north of the tower, there is the Bower of Verdure, and behind this the Gallery of the Rising Sun. To the left of the gallery and over yet another bridge, lies the Hill Retreat of the Flourishing Cassia. To the east is a knoll constructed from piled up yellow rocks, with rising and falling formations and a rugged angular

¹A student of the profession of commerce in the local State Academy. By Imperial grace he was granted the honorary title of Director of the Board of Imperial Villas, Gardens, Parks etc. (LQ)

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appearance. Above this knoll stands a small pavilion, and turning north along the path you come to the Double Painted Boat, also called the Boat of Flowing Fragrance.

The lay-out of the garden and its buildings has been preserved, but it is in an extremely dilapidated and desolate condition.

Jie'an pointed to the garden and said: "The glory of Mount Ping lies not in its rivers and hills, but in its gardens and pavilions. The glory of this garden has three aspects: at the front, the rocks; at the rear, the bamboos; and in the centre, the water. And then the way its long covered walkways interconnect, the way its intricately designed buildings are juxtaposed and joined—this is what makes it the glory of the entire Yangzhou district. I myself have personally shared in the pleasures of this garden. Now when I recollect the past and think of the present, I find the contrast between the 'gorgeous mansion' and this desolate 'hillside' unbearably poignant.²

I smiled and recited the aforementioned lyric verse of the Grand Old Poet, Su Dongpo. When I came to the lines:

Say not that
All of Creation
In the turn of a head
Is Void;
Before the head even turns
All is dream.

Jie'an brought his palms together in Buddhist salutation³ and said:

"How enlightened! How very to the point!"
Whereupon we both laughed, and bade each other adieu.

²This refers to lines from the poem 'Konghou yin' 筌篋引 by Cao Zhi 曹植: In life we may live in a splendid house, / But broken and fallen we revert to the mountain grave. Translation from George W. Kent, *Worlds of Dust and Jade* (N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1969).

³The Buddhist salutation signifies homage and deference. Here the homage is paid both to the wisdom of Su Dongpo's 蘇東坡 line, and to the felicitous recitation by Linqing.