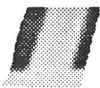




*Mu Shim Sunim JDPS
Seoul International Zen Center*



Flower Valley Temple

Hwa Gye Sah temple is the home of the Seoul International Zen Center and our school's head temple in Asia. It also functions as a traditional Buddhist temple with resident monks and a large lay congregation. Located in the north-eastern part of Seoul, Hwa Gye Sah sits at the foot of Sam Gak Mountain looking out to the east over the city. Zen Master Seung Sahn says that when he first started going there in the early 50's it would take him the better part of a day to walk from the main train station in downtown Seoul to the temple. Nowadays it's an easy 35-minute ride on the subway from downtown, and then a 15-minute walk up the mountain. The more faint of heart can of course take a taxi or bus up to the temple. As you walk up out of the urban sprawl of this modern city of thirteen million residents, you enter a completely different world. The busy traffic and air pollution are left behind, and you are greeted by the sound of the mountain stream, the calm of the forest and the faint smell of incense... the mind relaxes. Naturally, you bow before the traditional temple buildings.

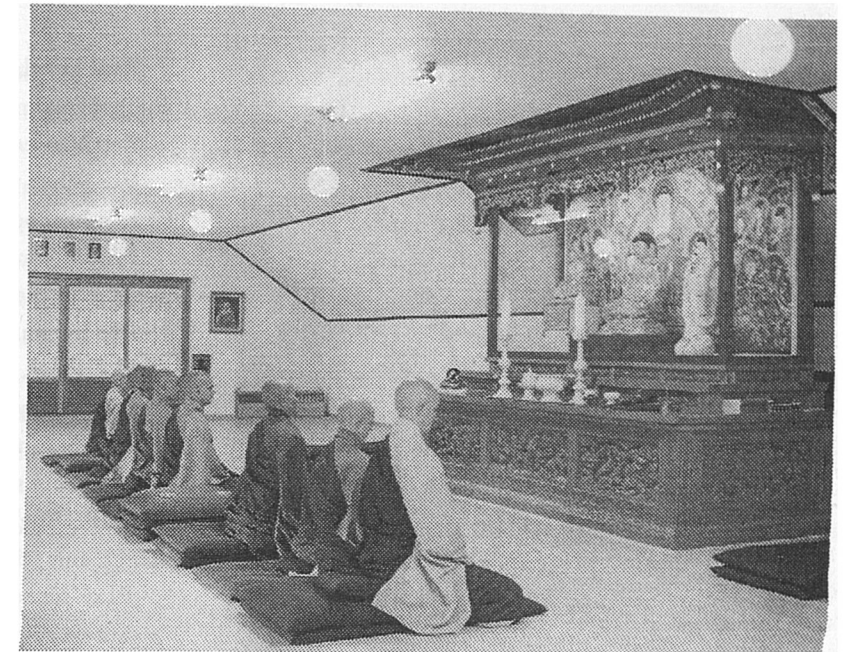
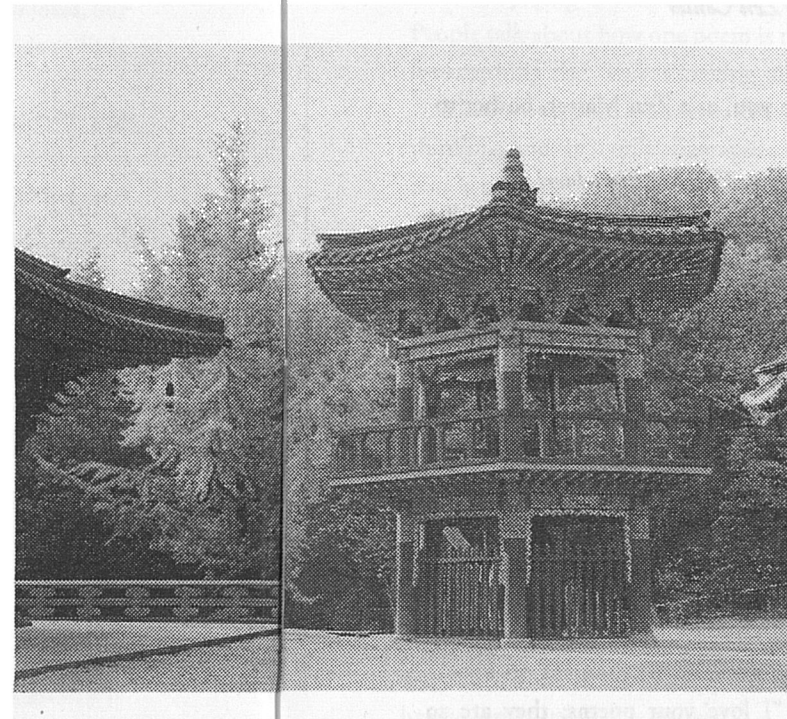
Hwa Gye Sah, meaning "flower valley temple," was first built in 1523 by the monk Shin Wol Sunim during the reign of King Chung-jung (r. 1506-1544). It was destroyed by fire in 1618 and rebuilt in the following years by the Precepts Master Do Wol Sunim. After 240 years the temple became so dilapidated that two monks, Yong-Son and Pom-Un, had it renovated in 1866.

Hwa Gye Sah is famous for its many antiquities. The antique statues of the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha (Ji Jang Bosal) and the ten traditional Confucian judges in the Funeral Hall (the Myong Bu Jon in Korean) are especially famous. Carved by the Great Zen Master Nawong in the late Koryo Dynasty, the figures were brought to Hwa Gye Sah in 1877 as a gift by the Queen Mother Cho Dae Bi. After that, the temple served as the worship place for the royal family in Seoul.

Other antiquities of note include the two large incense burners on either side of the Main Buddha Hall, and most interesting are several famous calligraphies made by the



*A view of Hwa Gye Sah
from the Zen Master
Ko Bong memorial;
bell and drum tower;
dharma room at
Seoul International
Zen Center*



governor of Korea who stayed several years at Hwa Gye Sah in the 1890's. It was said that he came to the temple especially because the pure water was very good for treating skin problems from which he suffered greatly. Even today this water—called yak su or medicine water—is one of the big attractions for the people from the neighborhoods below Hwa Gye Sah. Every morning you can see them making a pilgrimage up the mountain with their plastic jugs... Hwa Gye Sah's modern-day version of selling water by the stream.

During the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945), Hwa Gye Sah came under the care of Japanese-style married monks who raised their families in the temple. After the liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945 this trend continued until the Korean War (1950–52), when the temple was occupied at one point by Communist soldiers. It was not until 1958, when Zen Master Seung Sahn became the temple abbot, that the temple was reformed and brought back into the Chogye Order, the traditional order of celibate monks in Korea.

During his last years Zen Master Seung Sahn's teacher, Zen Master Ko Bong, stayed at Hwa Gye Sah. He was ill and

in need of a place to convalesce. Although Zen Master Ko Bong was a great Zen Master, he had never held a position at any temple or established a temple of his own. This was because he was a complete freedom-style Zen Master who had few dealings with other monks and only taught nuns and lay people. When he became older, Zen Master Ko Bong suffered a stroke. At that time Zen Master Seung Sahn had become abbot of Hwa Gye Sah, and took his teacher to there to live. It is said that despite his advanced age and illness Ko Bong Sunim never forgot his role as Zen Master and teacher.

At one time he was walking across the Hwa Gye Sah yard with our teacher Zen Master Seung Sahn to leave the temple. Ko Bong Sunim took a wrong turn and started walking off towards the woods. Zen Master Seung Sahn gently steered him back in the direction they needed to go, but Ko Bong Sunim only shouted at him, "How dare you correct your teacher, you are just a young monk! Have you no respect?" After a few steps, once again Ko Bong Sunim went off in the wrong direction, and again Zen Master Seung Sahn corrected him. Again, he was scolded by his teacher for helping him, and they continued on in this way several times until they finally reached their destination. In

this way, with great love and compassion, Zen Master Seung Sahn helped his teacher in the last few years of his life before he passed away in 1961.

During the time that Zen Master Ko Bong and Zen Master Seung Sahn were staying at Hwa Gye Sah, several other great Zen Masters in Korean Buddhism came there to live. One of them was Hyo Bong Sunim, one of the most famous Zen Masters in recent Korean history and teacher of Ku San (Nine Mountains) Zen Master. Before he became a monk, Hyo Bong Sunim was a judge in Korea during the Japanese occupation. At one time he was asked to sentence one of his fellow Koreans to death for a crime against the Japanese that he felt was unjust. After much agonizing over this judicial decision, he decided to leave his home and judge's position in order to seek the truth. He soon attained enlightenment and taught many disciples.

Other renowned residents during this period were Jeok Um Sunim, Dok Sahn Zen Master, and Chun Seong Sunim, all disciples of the great Zen Master Man Gong. Jeok Um Sunim was teacher of Byok Am Kun Sunim, the head of Shin Won Sah temple, where we hold our three-month winter retreats. Hwa Gye Sah became known at this time as the premier Zen temple. It attracted many lay people

from the Seoul area who sought to practice and learn from the Zen Masters and monks who lived there.

Construction on a new building for the Seoul International Zen Center was begun in 1989 and completed five years later in 1994. In 1995–96, the memorial pagoda area for Zen Master Ko Bong, Zen Master Dok Sahn and Precepts Master Jeok Um was renovated and completed. In 1997 a new temple gate was constructed at the entrance to the temple. Also, in 1996 an arsonist attempted to burn down the building that housed the new Dharma Hall and the Seoul International Zen Center. Fortunately, several monks from the Zen Center discovered the fire and it was soon put out, although not until almost one million dollars of damage to the dharma hall was done. Despite this serious setback, under the continued wise leadership of Zen Master Seung Sahn, Hwa Gye Sah has gone on to become a most active dharma center for both international students and Korean Buddhists, hosting two three-month Kyol Ches a year, and several one-hundred day chanting retreats that are all very well attended. Indeed, one can say that many wonderful flowers have come to bloom in the valley that holds Hwa Gye Sah temple.