

Pilgrimage in China: A Trip to Jiu Hua Mountain

Editor's Note:

In April of 2014, a group of monastics and laypeople from our Asian sangha visited root temples from our Chinese heritage at Jiu Hua Mountain in China. The tour was documented in photographs by Teresa C. H. Tao, who was kind enough to share them with us, along with some captions about the sites. Visits to sites such as these have the feel of a pilgrimage, which is also part of the Zen tradition. We've asked Zen Master Ji Kwang, who has gone on pilgrimages in India and elsewhere, to say something about the spirit of pilgrimage. Mengxiao Wang and Guo Gu Yu provided translations of some of the calligraphies seen in the photos. I've chosen stories about encounters between the ancestors to add to some of the photographs. It may help us appreciate why these sites have been preserved and the reason for visiting them. When Dizang asked Fayen why Fayen was on a pilgrimage, Fayen said, "I don't know." Dizang responded, "Not knowing is most intimate." May this essay help us become intimate with our ancestors.

Going for a Pilgrimage

Zen Master Ji Kwang

Some years ago I experienced many inspiring days and weeks together with my wife at Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage sites in India, Nepal, Burma and Thailand. I clearly remember how overwhelming it was walking, sitting and chanting at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya. We were touched by the energy of the place and

spent many hours each day at the temple compound in a state full of peace, bliss and good feelings.

But why and how does visiting particular Buddhist places help us? India, China, Korea, Thailand and Japan are full of temples and holy places. Do those locations indeed have special powers that benefit us as pilgrims? Here is a story dealing with this.

Once a successful businessman from China was about to leave for a business trip to a place in another part of his country. When his old mother heard about this, she immediately was reminded of a holy shrine near his destination, where bones from Buddha Shakyamuni were stored—at least this is what Buddhist people believed. So the mother asked her son to bring some relics from this place. The man went there, had a successful business trip, and only when he arrived back at his hometown he remembered his mother's



wish. But alas, he had completely forgotten about the relics. By chance he saw some bones from a dead dog at the side of the road near the railway station and picked them up, wrapped them in a nice cloth and went home.

When he entered the house his mother immediately asked him whether he had been able to bring some relics with him. He handed the beautifully wrapped bones to her; the old lady was overwhelmed with joy and tears were flowing down her cheeks. The same day she went to a Buddhist shop and bought a small golden pagoda in which she placed the holy bones from Buddha and placed it prominently on her altar. Soon the neighbors and the whole village heard about the relics. They all came to the house, did many bows and practiced there together in front of the altar. When the house became too small, they built a temple there with all the donations that appeared. Finally this place became a famous pilgrimage site in the area. The old lady was very happy and attained great enlightenment due to her persistent and intense practice in front of her altar with the holy relics. She also helped and served all the pilgrims and spent time together with them like a great bodhisattva.

There is no doubt about one thing: what we usually find at pilgrimage sites are old stones and bricks,

maybe old bones or teeth connected with old stories. Is a pilgrimage just a sentimental deceit, brainwashing and self-deception?

As the *Avatamsaka Sutra* says: Our mind makes everything. If we believe in holiness, we see holiness. If we open ourselves to something we believe is special, it becomes special. Then it is possible that this “special” affects us, nourishes us, inspires us and generates a special experience.

Zen Master Seung Sahn once said that Un Mun’s shit stick has already broken all temples. The message is clear: don’t hold on to “special,” don’t attach to holiness, don’t even keep any ideas. Then everything is Buddha—even dog bones are Buddha. Our practice means to become clear, attain freedom and help all beings. In this respect a pilgrimage tour may become a wonderful part of our practice. Everyone who has been to Bodh Gaya or to famous temples in China or Korea knows how much inspiration such a visit can induce. We meet new comrades on the path, practice with full endeavor and experience supportive energy. We get free from our situation, condition and opinions, and we attain “Sky is blue over the old pagoda.”

Photos and captions by Teresa C.H. Tao

Day 1, April 15, 2014



Zen Master Dae Kwan (abbot of Su Bong Zen Monastery, Hong Kong) presented a gift to Ven. Zhong Zue (abbot of Da Jue Temple and Nan Quan Temple, China). The couplet reads:

三日修身千載寶
(Three days of self-cultivation—a jewel that lasts for thousands of years.)

百年食物一朝塵
(A hundred years worth of provisions—mere dust of a single day.)

Day 2, April 16, 2014



Thousand-Buddha Hall in the Third-Ancestor Temple, Qian Shan County, An Hui Province. The calligraphy “Thousand Buddha Hall” on the horizontal board was written by Mr. Zhao Puchu (1907–2000), a religious and public leader who promoted cultural progress and religious tolerance in China. As president of the Communist Party of China, he supported the Buddhist Association of China. He was also a renowned calligrapher.



Bai Sui Gong Temple, Jiu Hua Mountain. (Bai Sui means “a hundred years old.”) Ven. Wu Xia’s corporeal body (mummy) is located inside. (Wu Xia means “flawless.”)

欽賜百歲宮

(The Imperially Decreed Hall of Hundredfold Age.)

護國萬年寺

(The State-Protection Monastery of Ten Thousand Years.)



The corporeal body (mummy) of Ven. Ren Yi, who was the abbot of Tong Hye Zen Temple, Jiu Hua Mountain. (The name Ren Yi literally means “humanity justice.”)

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The Sutra Hall of Hua Cheng Temple, Jiu Hua Mountain.



Five-Hundred-Arhat Hall on Jiu Hua Mountain. It is located right beside Bai Sui Gong Temple. After Shakyamuni Buddha entered Nirvana, the Venerable Mahakashyapa led 500 arhats to compile the Tripitaka (“Three Treasuries,” the Buddhist scriptural canon) at the Seven-Leaf Cave.

Day 3, April 17, 2014



Da Jue Temple, Jiu Hua Mountain. (Da Jue means "great enlightenment.") The abbot is Ven. Zhong Zue.



Jiu Hua Mountain Da Yuan Buddhist Culture Park. (Da Yuan means "great vow.") Behind the gate is the 99-meter statue of the Earth Store Bodhisattva (aka Ji Jang Bosal).

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Zen Hall of Da Jue Temple, Jiu Hua Mountain.

Day 4, April 18, 2014



Nan Quan Zen Temple ruins, Tong Ling city, An Hui Province. (Nan Quan means "south spring.") The temple was named after Zen Master Nan Quan (aka Nam Cheon), best known as the protagonist in the kong-an "Nam Cheon Kills a Cat."

铜陵市郊区文物

(Historical preservation site in the suburb of Tongling City.)

南泉寺遗址

(Relics of the South Spring Temple.)



Cave of the San Zu, Qian Shan County, An Hui Province. (San Zu means "third ancestor.")

The left line reads: "Shen Kwang mind-to-mind transmission to Sengcan." (Shen Kwang is the Second Ancestor's secular name. He is more commonly known as Huike. Sengcan was the Third Ancestor.) The right line reads: "Dharma transmission in the sacred site of Si Kong Mountain."

Third Ancestor Sengcan's Enlightenment

A layman whose name is not known [who would later become Sengcan, the Third Ancestor] came to Huike and said, "My body has been wracked by a terrible illness. I ask that you help me absolve the transgression I've committed that has caused this."

Huike said, "Bring me the transgression you've committed and I'll absolve it."

The layman said, "I look for the transgression but I can't find it."

Huike said, "There, I've absolved your transgression. Now you should abide in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha."¹



The abbot of the Fourth-Ancestor Temple, Ven. Ming Ji, gives a gift to Zen Master Dae Bong.



Memorial Hall of the former abbot, Ven. Jin Hui at the Fourth-Ancestor Temple, Huang Mei County, Hu Bei Province.

八解六通心地印

(The eight liberations and the six spiritual penetrations are the seal of the mind-ground.)

六度萬行體中圓

(The six paramitas and the myriad practices are perfected in [the mind's] essence.)

Fourth Ancestor Daoxin's Enlightenment

The novice monk Daoxin, only fourteen years old, came to pay respect to Sengcan.

Daoxin said, "I ask for the Master's compassion. Please tell me of the gate of emancipation."

Sengcan said, "Who has bound you?"

Daoxin said, "No one has bound me."

Sengcan said, "Then why are you seeking emancipation?"²

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The-Fifth Ancestor Temple, Huang Mei County, Hu Bei Province.

上接達摩一脈

(Inheriting upward the single lineage of Bodhidharma.)

下傳能秀兩家

(Transmitting downward both lineages of Huineng and Shenxiu.)

Fifth Ancestor Hongren

Legend has it that Hongren is the reincarnation of an ancient Daoist master who, as an old man, met Daoxin. Asking for the Dharma, he was told that he was too old to pass it along, and that he should seek him out in the next life. Subsequently born to a poor village woman, he was called the "No-Name Child" and was said to have all but seven of the marks of the Buddha. Daoxin encountered the child while walking to Huangmei. He asked the boy, "What is your name?" The boy answered, "I have a name, but it isn't a permanent name." Daoxin said, "What name is it?" The boy answered, "Buddha." Daoxin said, "You don't have a name?" The boy said, "It's empty, so I don't possess it."³



The Sixth Ancestor's working area, the Fifth Ancestor Temple, Huang Mei County, Hu Bei Province.

慧能舂米處

(The place where Huineng pounded rice.)

祖師遺物

(These are the relics of the Sixth Ancestor.)

嚴禁觸摸

(Touching them is forbidden.)

Sixth Ancestor

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I then went to pay homage to the Ancestor. He asked, "Where are you from and what do you want?"

I replied, "I am a commoner from Xinzhou in Guangdong. I have traveled far to pay my respects and ask for nothing but Buddhahood."

"You are a native of Guangdong, a barbarian? How can you expect to be a Buddha?" asked the Ancestor.

I replied, "Although people may be from the north or south, Buddha-Nature originally has no north or south. A barbarian may be different from the Ancestor physically, but there is no difference in our Buddha-Nature."

He was going to speak further to me, but the presence of other disciples made him stop. He then ordered me to join the others to work.

Then I said, "May I tell you, Venerable, that Prajna (transcendental Wisdom) often rises in my mind. When one does not stray from True Nature, that is called a 'field of merit.' Venerable, what work would you ask me to do?"

"This barbarian is too bright," he remarked. "Go to the stable and speak no more." I then went to the rear of the monastery and was told by a lay brother to split firewood and pound rice.

More than eight months later the Ancestor saw me one day and said, "I know your knowledge of Buddhism is very sound; but I have to refrain from speaking to you, because bad people may harm you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir, I do. To avoid people taking notice of me, I dare not go near you."⁴

Notes

1. From Andrew Ferguson, *Zen's Chinese Heritage* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 21.
2. *Ibid.*, 24.
3. *Ibid.*, 27, 30.
4. From *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, translated by Dae Kwang Sunim and Dae Kwan Sunim (Hong Kong: Su Bong Zen Monastery, 2007), 151–52. Please note that in this quotation we have changed *Patriarch* to *Ancestor*, for consistency with the rest of this article.



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