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IN BUDDHIST TEMPLES, VI

MYŌSHINJI

Myōshinji standing in the western part of Kyoto is the largest temple in Japan, belonging to Rinzai Zen. It was built originally by the Emperor Hanazono as an imperial villa, but as he was deeply devoted to Zen he converted the palace into a temple, called it Myōshinji, which means "Temple of Mysterious Mind," and gave it to the priest Kwanzan Kokushi (1277-1360) to whom he was deeply devoted. The Emperor built a small temple for himself in the grounds of Myōshinji and there he became a priest after his retirement.

Kwanzan Kokushi called Egen who became the first abbot of Myōshinji was Daito Kokushi's most gifted pupil.

The temple flourished until the days of the Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. When Ouchi Yoshihiro, a pupil of the abbot, rebelled against the Shōgun, Yoshimitsu was very angry and confiscated the temple. Later, it was rebuilt by Nichiho but was burned down during the Ōnin War. But at last it was re-built for the third time by the priest Sekko and has since flourished as the foremost of Japan's Zen temples.

Myōshinji consists of many buildings large and small set in spacious grounds with fine old pine trees. As Gaston Migeon says, "On every side there are more temple porches, their noble architecture enriched by splendid wood carving, great courtyards, the fine sand of which is constantly raked, and lastly trees, rising always just at the spot, where the outlines and the fanciful arabesque of their branches will enhance the beauty of the scene. Myōshinji may be considered the type of these beautiful semi-religious, semi-imperial residences."

The temple buildings were constructed at a time when

whole trees were used for beams and the interior of some of the rooms are like vast cathedrals, while the heavy tiled roofs on the outside give an effect of grandeur.

The sammon or great gate in its upper story has an impressive statue of Shakya the Buddha, and around him are his companions, the sixteen Arhats. These are three-quarter life size, most interesting in their various poses and forceful expressions, two or three young and handsome, but most of them resembling hardy, gnarled old trees, men of will and determination who have resolved to walk the path of the Arhat. The decorations of the room in blue and gold with the vista of green pine-trees through the open door make an unforgettable picture.

The great bell of Myōshinji is famous for its pure full tone which is greatly admired. The Temple bell! How often in Japanese literature and religion do we find these words, and when we read them we seem to hear the reverberant strokes of some great temple bell, perhaps of Myōshinji. This bell was cast in 697 C. E.

The Gyokuho is the Holy of Holies, as it were, of Myōshinji, for this was the retreat for thirty years of the Emperor Hanazono, and mementoes of his are scattered about Myōshinji but specially concentrated here at the Gyokuho where his memorial tablet is enshrined and his statue preserved. This statue sits in an attitude of meditation in the mystical darkness beyond the beautiful madreperl panels which Hideyoshi brought as trophy from Korea. Priestly robes are arranged as in life upon the statue which is remarkably realistic and a fine piece of sculpture.

Just beyond this quiet retreat is the hall for the founder of the temple, Kwanzan Kokushi, the priest-friend of the Emperor. The Hall in which his effigy is reverently kept is dark, for the floors are all of black lacquer. Every day, the face of the founder's statue is wiped, and tea and rice are offered to him as if he were still alive. There is nothing here to disturb his meditation. All is still, the trees of the

garden bend down their branches to the grey sand and the wide white stepping stones beneath, as if to protect the sacred interior from intrusion.

In the *Nehando* is the famous black bronze slab carved by Yoshioka Buzen representing the death of the Buddha when all the animals came sorrowing to his departure. A similar slab is preserved at *Kōyasan*.

In the placid garden is the shrine dedicated to *Sutegimi*, *Hideyoshi's* first son who died when he was only a very little boy. His statue gazes wistfully at us, but the toy ship in which his representation used to sit, has been taken away to the Museum. His early death by drowning was a great disappointment and sorrow to the house of *Toyotomi*.

In the building called *Hatto* or ceremonial hall is the great dragon painted on the ceiling by *Tannyu Hōgen Morinobu*.

It was at the time of *Gudo* that the dragon was painted on the ceiling of the *Hatto* (literally, *Dharma-hall*) by *Tannyu*, one of the most illustrious names of the *Kano* school. The story runs thus: *Gudo* one day asked the painter to draw a dragon for his temple, but the latter refused on the ground that he never saw a dragon in his life. *Gudo* said, "If so, I will let you see one if you so desire." As he agreed, the abbot gave him a *kōan*, saying, "When you solve it, you will see a living dragon." It took some time before *Tannyu* could solve the problem. He then came to the abbot and said, "I have seen a dragon." The abbot demanded, "I should like to see it with my own eyes and also hear it roar." After several vain attempts to make him hear the roaring dragon, *Tannyu* decided to paint one on the ceiling with all the artistic skill he could command. When the time came to unveil the picture the abbot stepped into the Hall to conduct the ceremony. The curtains were drawn back, and lo! the fierce dragon with a pair of glaring eyes and with a deafening roar came forth from among the clouds of lightning and thunder. It looked as if it were

about to devour the abbot, who was greatly alarmed and for a while unable to go on with the recitation. And this same creature painted three hundred years ago we see in the Hall.

Mr Pier well describes it when he says, "So realistically is the monster depicted that the giant shafts of the columns, each and all of hard *Keyaki*-wood, appear to tremble beneath its convulsive onrush. Truly superb are the great sweeps of glossiest and deepest black, soft rose pink and glowing yellow in which Tannyu has painted it. It seems, indeed, that the artist would have us look through the hurtling thunder-cloud in which the monster writhes and see the rose and gold of the sunset that shall presently follow the passing of this storm-fiend."

Indeed the effect of this hall with its enormous *Keyaki* pillars, the altars done in black lacquer with the brooding peaceful Buddha in the centre is impressive, while the great dragon above lights up the whole hall which otherwise would be dark and dismal.

Behind the Hatto is another large building, the Butsuden, containing three fine golden statues of Sākyamuni, Kāśyapa, and Ānanda.

The ancient bath-house building which looks as if it might be a sub-temple instead of a bath-house, has an interesting story connected with it, for it was built for the benefit of Akechi Mitsuhide, who killed his master Oda Nobunaga.

There are many sub-temples at Myōshinji and each of them contains wonderful works of art in painting, sculpture, or in metal and lacquer work.

The Rinkwa-in has many of such treasures including the landscape designs from the brush of Tōhakū, master of sumi and powdered gold leaf. Mr Pier has an interesting note on Tōhakū's monkey which I cannot refrain from quoting, "That gifted artist has represented in his bold and rugged style, a long-armed monkey, hanging from the end of a willow branch, which reaches out far over the quiet

water of a marshy pool. The history of the painting is well known, and an amusing story is told in connection with it. It seems that the Lord of Kaga dreamt that he was attacked by one of the monkeys and that he seized his sword and struck off one of its hands. When he awoke the next morning he was astonished to find that he hacked off the arm of one of Tōhakū's monkeys. As a result these screens were always alluded to as 'the cut-arm monkey screen.' Both the subject and the technique remind one strongly of the Sung artist, Muchi, whose style Tōhakū would seem to have thoroughly digested. There is also much of Sesshū visible in the work."

The Chinese artists are well represented at Myōshinji and here at Rinkwa-in some fine examples of them are to be found and also some of the monochrome paintings of the Zen school which modeled itself upon the work of the Chinese masters.

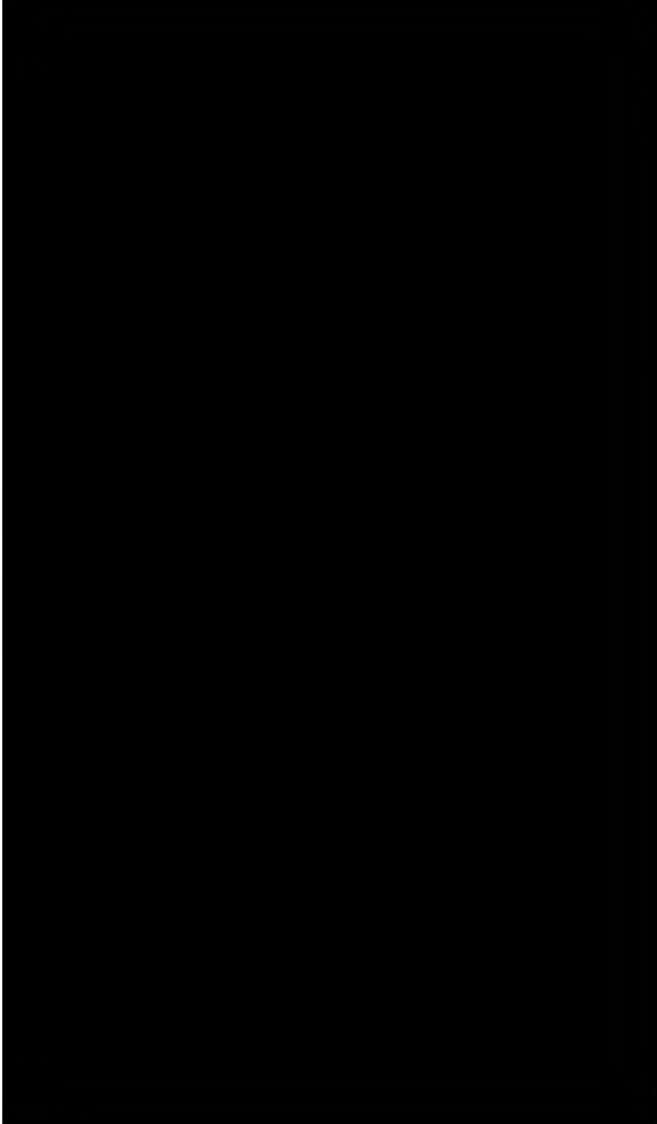
At the Tenkyū-in screen paintings by Sauraku may be admired and at the Kaifuku-in screen paintings by Tannyu. At the Reiun-in which is sometimes called the Motonobu temple are preserved the paintings of this celebrated artist. These are considered to be the gems of Myōshinji. There are forty-nine *fusuma* (screen) landscape pictures in the Chinese style and fifty-three *kakemono* in black and white. Gaston Migeon says, "The exceptional treasures of Myōshinji, which make it a place of pilgrimage for all lovers of art who visit Japan, are the two series of paintings by Motonobu there preserved. They show two aspects of the genius of that prodigious master, one of the greatest of Japan, who gave such prestige to the school of Kano in its very beginnings, at the dawn of the fifteenth century. They consist of two series of *fusumas*, which the Emperor Reigen fortunately caused to be mounted as *kakemonos* seventy years after their execution, to save them from the ravages of time or man; they have consequently come down to us in an extraordinary state of preservation. They are preserved in the Reiun-in, where

Motonobu spent several summers studying the rules of the Zen sect, and where he painted them. He painted at the same time the portrait of his master, the priest Daikiu Kokushi, in his gold-embroidered vestments and his Chinese shoes—a portrait which impresses by its obvious fidelity and its careful, though somewhat dry and hard execution.”

The Zendo (residence for monks) is a large one and sometimes as many as ninety monks are in attendance leading the Zen life which is a combination of work and meditation. Myōshinji is one of the places where Zen is taught and lived, for Zen is a philosophy of life which helps for daily living as well as a key to unlock the secret of the universe—the revelation of the significance of life. It is to gain this that the black robed monks sit quietly at meditation in the Zendo and also undergo the discipline of the Zen life. When freedom is attained, they are rewarded and feel that their long hours of work and meditation have brought compensation.

I cannot close this story of Myōshinji without writing something of its founder, Kwanzan Kokushi. He was born in the province of Shinano as a son of a Minamoto nobleman in the year 1277 c. e. His mother once had a dream that a golden mendicant gave her a branch of a flower and in the following year she gave birth to her son. He was brought up in a religious atmosphere and became a monk when eleven years old under Daio Kokushi of Kamakura, but later he went to his home in Shinshu and built a temple there. Still later, he went to Kyoto and studied under Daito Kokushi who gave him the name of Kwanzan.

When Daito Kokushi was dying, the Emperor asked him, “Who will be my teacher when you are gone?” Daito recommended Kwanzan for his successor. When the Imperial messenger was sent to carry the news to this priest, it was not easy to find him, for he was living most modestly and humbly in the mountains, helping the villagers with their farming and wood-cutting without their suspecting who he



Kwanzan Kokushi (1277-1360)

was. At first he refused to go to the capital, but when he was told that the Emperor was depending upon him and that his own master Daito Kokushi had ordered him to be his successor as teacher to the Emperor, he reluctantly left his mountain abode. Before he left, the villagers asked him to recite a sutra, and they brought their cows which Kwanzan Kokushi had taken care of to the service that they too might share in hearing the sacred scripture recited by their former care-taker. Legend says that the cows bowed their heads and that tears filled their eyes. Probably this is a symbol of the extreme regret with which the mountain farmers parted with their priest-friend, and it shows the character of Kwanzan. It was then that the Emperor gave up his palace, made it into a temple, and presented it to Kwanzan Kokushi. Kwanzan was famous as a trainer of priests, and, when he died at eighty-four years old, was mourned by many followers.

The real founder of every Zen temple is Bodhidharma (popularly known in Japan as Daruma) the Indian priest who carried Zen teaching to China in 513 c. e. where he is said to have sat for nine years in uninterrupted meditation. He is generally represented with a beard, clad in a red robe, and is a favourite subject with Zen artists. In Zen temples his statue is always enshrined together with the founder's. He is said to be the one who introduced tea into China.

According to the story, Dharma practised every kind of asceticism, and underwent all manner of hardships. He lived only upon herbs and practised meditation day and night. But in spite of himself he could not keep awake at night, so he resolved to cut off his eyelids, and having done so, he threw them away on the ground. The next day, he was surprised to find that in that place where each eyelid had been a shrub was growing. He took the leaves of this plant and ate them and was so invigorated, he received new strength for his contemplation. This shrub was the plant now called tea.

There is a close connection between the Tea Ceremony

and Zen in principle and spirit, they are similar in doctrine, for the aim of both is to promote mental composure and meditation. We may say that the Tea Ceremony is a kind of preparation for Zen practice. As Okakura says, "Teaism is a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence. It inculcates purity and harmony, the mystery of mutual charity, the romanticism of the social order. It is essentially a worship of the Imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life. The Philosophy of Tea is not mere estheticism in the ordinary acceptance of the term, for it expresses conjointly with ethics and religion our whole point of view about man and nature. It is hygiene, for it enforces cleanliness; it is economics, for it shows comfort in simplicity rather than in the complex and costly; it is moral geometry, inasmuch as it defines our sense of proportion to the universe. It represents the true spirit of Eastern democracy by making all its votaries aristocrats in taste."

Just as there is a close connection between the Tea Ceremony and Zen doctrine so there is a close connection between the Tea Ceremony and Zen art. At the time of the Tea Ceremony, a picture would be hung in the tokonoma, for to the Zen priest, a picture was not only to hang behind an altar or place upon screens but to use for life. The Zen priests preferred black and white rather than colour as more in harmony with the strict formality of the Tea Ceremony. They were modeled upon the Zen style of the Chinese arists. Zen became pre-eminent, not only as religion, a discipline of life, but also as art. Zen grew to be a centre of culture and thought in Japan in ways that it has never lost. Much that is finest in Japan to-day bears the touch of Zen, in religion, art, literature, indeed life itself.

Myōshinji being a Zen temple is a delightful resort whether to one who is a seeker for enlightenment, a lover of books, a student of history, or a pilgrim for general insight

into Japanese culture. It is charming in natural setting, rich in artistic treasures, a centre of Zen and a key to one who would penetrate more deeply into the realm of being.

SEIREN (BLUE LOTUS)