

Lingyin Temple

Hangzhou, China



Lingyin Temple (灵隐寺; pinyin: Língyǐn Sì) is a Buddhist temple of the Chan sect located in the north-west part of Hangzhou, China. The temple's name is commonly literally translated as **Temple of the Soul's Retreat**. It is one of the largest and wealthiest Buddhist temples in China. The Lingyin Temple grounds contain numerous pagodas and Buddhist grottoes. The monastery is the largest of several temples in the Wulin Mountains (武林山), which also features a large number religious rock carvings, the most famous of which are on the large stone hill known as **Feilai Feng** (飞来峰; literally "the peak that flew hither").



The monastery was founded in 328 AD during the Eastern Jin Dynasty by monk Huili, who came from India. From its inception, Lingyin was a famous monastery in the Jiangnan region. At its peak under the Kingdom of Wuyue (907-978), the temple boasted nine multi-story buildings, 18 pavilions, 72 halls, more than 1300 dormitory rooms, inhabited by more than 3000 monks.

Many of the rich Buddhist carvings in the Feilai Feng grottos and surrounding mountains also date from ca. 900.



During the latter Southern Song Dynasty, the monastery was regarded as one of the ten most important temples of the Chan sect in the Jiangnan region. However, its prominence has not saved the temple from marauders. It has been rebuilt no less than sixteen times since then. The current buildings are modern restorations of late Qing buildings. During the Cultural Revolution, the temple and grounds suffered some damage at the hands of Red Guards. However, they escaped large scale destruction partly because of the protection of Premier Zhou Enlai. Today the temple is thriving as a destination for both pilgrims and tourists. It is regarded as one of the wealthiest monasteries in China, and regular pilgrims have included former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping.

Feilai Feng, or "the Peak that Flew Hither", also commonly translated as "Flying Peak", is located in front of the temple proper. The peak is so-named because it is made of limestone, giving it a craggy appearance very different from the surrounding mountains. Legend holds that the peak was originally from India (with some versions suggesting that it is Vulture Peak, but flew to Hangzhou overnight as a demonstration of the omnipotence of Buddhist law. A large number of carvings dot the surface of the peak and in various caves. Within the main cave, dedicated to the bodhisattva Guanyin, there is a crack in the ceiling of the cave that stretches up to the surface, so that a person standing at a certain position can see a sliver of sunlight. This is known as the "one thread of heaven" (一线天).

The formal entrance of the temple is the Hall of the Heavenly Kings (Chinese: 天王殿; pinyin: Tiānwáng Diàn). This hall is a double-eaved building. The front of the building carries a plaque (Chinese: 云林禅寺; pinyin: Yúnlín Chán Sì; literally "Chan temple of the Clouds and Forests"), written by the Emperor Kangxi. The principal statue in this hall is that of the Maitreya Buddha in his manifestation as the cloth bag monk, or the Laughing Buddha. At the back, facing up the hill, is the Skanda Buddha, or Weituo as he is known in Chinese. This statue dates from the Southern Song Dynasty. Arranged along the left and right are the Four Heavenly Kings. The ceiling is ornately painted and decorated with phoenixes and dragons.



Courtyard in front the main hall bordered with trees

The Hall of Five Hundred Arhats (Chinese: 五百罗汉堂; pinyin: Wǔbǎi Luóhàn Táng), also a modern addition, faces onto the western side of the court yard in front of the main hall. The building has a complex floor plan, shaped like a Buddhist wan symbol. A wan is an ancient symbol that is a counter-clockwise Swastika. Along the arms of the swastika are arranged the five hundred arhats (Buddhist disciples) as slightly larger-than-life bronze statues. Each statue is seated on a unique ornate seat. At the centre, where the arms of the swastika join, stands a bronze canopy housing statues of four bodhisattvas representing the four cardinal directions. This is currently the tallest solid bronze structure in the world.



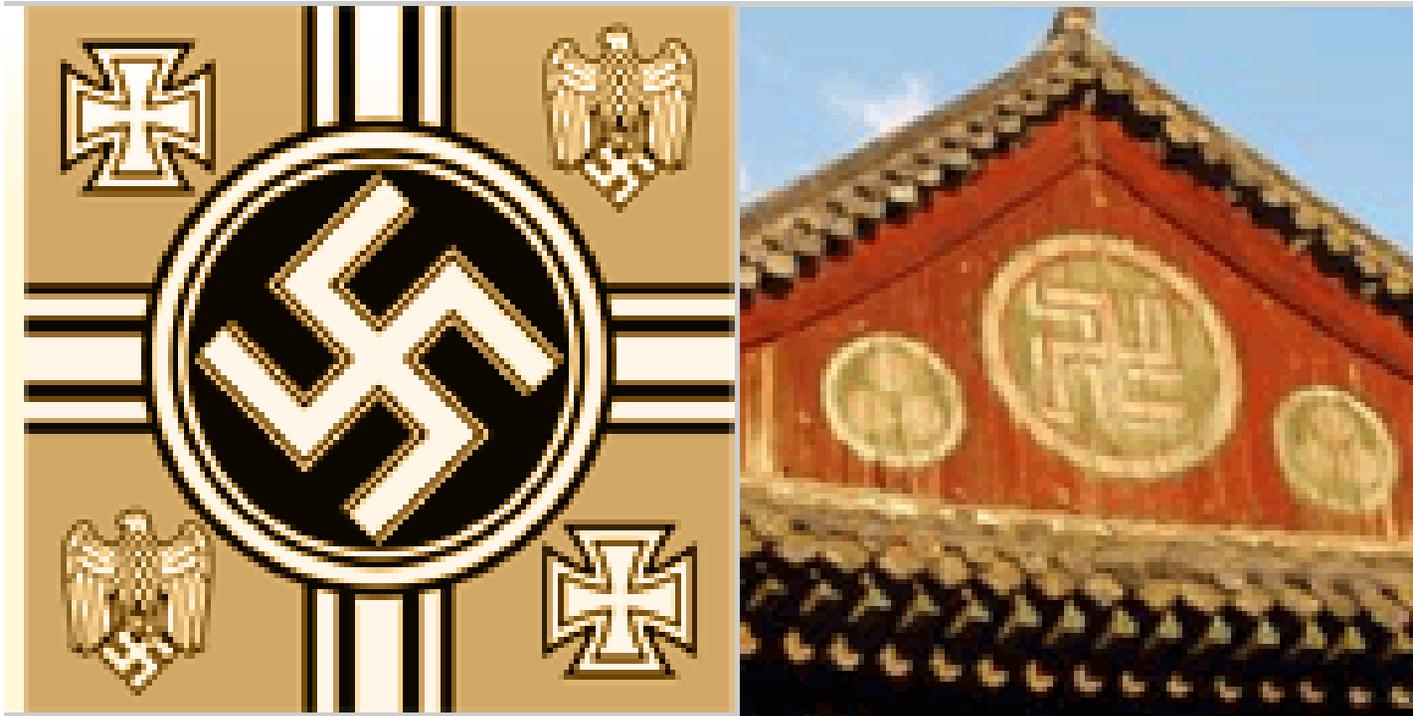
Dhritarashtra, the pipa-playing Heavenly King watching for the East and the wind

The second and principal hall is the Mahavira Hall, or the Grand Hall of the Great Sage (Chinese: 大雄宝殿; pinyin: Dàxíong Bǎodiàn). It is separated from the Hall of the Heavenly Kings by a large courtyard, featuring a raised lawn bordered with trees. The Grand Hall of the Great Sage is triple eaved and stands 33.6 metres tall. It houses, as is traditional, a statue of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. The present statue was carved in 1956 from camphor wood in Tang Dynasty style and coated with 60 taels of gold. It is the largest wooden Buddhist statue in China. At the back of the main statue is a statue of Guanyin, backed by a large screen that features the carved images of some 150 Buddhist personalities, including the pilgrims of the Journey to the West, Daoji, and arhats.



Guanyin, a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, with relief screen, at the back of the Grand Hall of the Great Sage

The Swastika has been a symbol of peace for millions of Hindus, Buddhists since it is their symbol of eternity. Note that the orientation is opposite to that used by the Nazis during their reign in Germany.



Nazi

Buddhist

Please do not be offended by the Buddhist wan. It has been used for thousands of years in many cultures. The Nazi's did many evil things. We should not let their misuse of a symbol destroy the cultural heritage of millions of people.

