

A Journey of Learning and Insight



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Chan Master Sheng Yen



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Series Foreword

During his long career as a monk, teacher of Buddhadharma, and founder of monasteries, meditation centers, and educational institutions, Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009) was also a very prolific lecturer, scholar, and author. Over the years, his published works in many languages have benefited students and seekers of the Dharma all over the world. To continue and further this blessing, Dharma Drum Mountain is committed to a long-term goal of translating selected volumes of the Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen from Chinese into English. This current volume, which we are pleased to present, is from this series.

There are more than one hundred volumes of the Complete Works. They cover three broad areas: (1) scholarly works, consisting of commentaries on major Mahayana and earlier scriptures, vinaya (monastic discipline), and seminal writings by Chinese Buddhist thinkers and Chan masters; (2) writings on the practice of Chan meditation for people at beginner and advanced levels; and (3) discourses on the practice of Chan in daily life with emphasis on a humanistic perspective.

Founded by Master Sheng Yen, Dharma Drum Mountain is an international organization engaging in three distinct types of academic, Chan practice and humanitarian activities that aim to uplift the character of humanity and create a pure land on earth.

Series Foreword

The Complete Works Translation Project, with the support of its Editorial Committee, thanks all who have made possible the publication of this and other volumes in the Series: donors, sponsors, translators, editors, proofreaders, graphical artists, monastic and lay disciples, and volunteers. We hope that this Series will help realize Master Sheng Yen's vision for a better world.

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Complete Works Translation Project

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For their specific contributions, we thank the following:

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Author's Preface

I am an ordinary Buddhist monk born in 1930 at a village in Jiangsu Province, Nantong County. The second year after my birth, there was a great flooding of the Yangzi River, which washed away our home and everything we owned. We were impoverished. My family then moved to the south bank of the Yangzi River. I was always weak in physique and prone to illness since childhood. I entered school at the age of nine, and left school when I was thirteen. I became a monk when I was fourteen [thirteen according to the Western way of recording age]. The basic education I received was equivalent to that of a fourth grade primary school student. While the other teenagers were studying at high school and university, I was busy working as a young monk and performing ritual services. Later, I served in the military for the country. Nevertheless, since I was young, I realized the importance of knowledge and education. I would take hold of any opportunity for self-study, and read many books. Meeting the educational requirements along with my published work, I was enrolled in Rissho University in Tokyo. Within six years time, I completed both a master's and a doctoral degree in Buddhist Literature.

From the time I realized that the sutras are used to provide knowledge and methods to purify society and the human mind, I felt lament. I thought, "The Dharma is so good, yet so few people know about it, and so many people misunderstand it." Ordinary people treat Buddhadharma as something secular or mystical; at best they treat

it as an academic study. Actually, Buddhism is a religion that applies wisdom and compassion to purify the human world.

Thus, I vowed to use contemporary ideas and language to introduce to others the true meaning of the Dharma that was forgotten, and to revive the spirit of Shakyamuni Buddha. As a result, I read a variety of books, especially Buddhist texts, which I studied and later wrote about assiduously.

Since my early years, I started submitting articles for publication, the materials ranging from literature and art to theoretical, from religious to theological, from articles on secular knowledge to academic theses on specific subjects. I have written for over 50 years and published over 40 books including those written in Chinese, Japanese, and English. They were published in Taiwan, Tokyo, the United States, and London, etc. In addition, several of my publications have been translated into Italian, Czech, and Vietnamese, and other languages. Buddhism is a religion that emphasizes practice. Through the cultivation of one's mental stability and calmness, one can achieve balance of the body and mind, improve one's character, lessen self-centeredness, care for others, and purify society. As a result, the objective of my personal reading and writing was to clarify and to give guidance on the theoretical concepts and practice methods. Primarily, my works follow the guidelines of placing emphasis on upholding moral precepts, teaching Chan practice, and clarifying concepts. I am personally compelled to follow the path of placing equal weight on the three Buddhist disciplines of precepts, meditation and wisdom. Thus, I would not be limited to the scope of what ordinary people would call Precepts Master, Chan Master or Dharma Master. For myself, I would always assume the status of Dharma Master because it is best to take its meaning of "taking the Dharma as one's master."

Due to the depth and extensiveness of Buddhadharma, one discovers through academic research that it is truly a great treasure in the history of world culture. To enhance the educational level and academic status of Buddhists, I have undertaken endeavors in Buddhist education and Buddhist research. I have been a professor at the Institute of Buddhist Studies of Chinese Culture University and Soochow University. I was invited to teach thesis writing to students in the doctorate program at the Graduate school of National Chengchi University. I have also established the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, which has been accredited by the Ministry of Education, to nourish professional Buddhist academic and educational talents. Beginning in 1990, our institute held the First Chung-Hwa International Conference on Buddhism hosting it again every two to three years, with Buddhist Traditions and Modern Society as the permanent topic. We gather leading Buddhist scholars worldwide to do research and hold discussions in various professional fields, for the purpose of practical application in today's society.

It is through the opportunity of holding International Conferences on Buddhism that I became associated with the famous Professor Fu Weixun at Temple University. He and his friend Prof. Sandra A. Wawrytko attended our International Conference twice, and gave us many suggestions. After the two conferences, they assisted in compiling both the Chinese and English versions of all the papers. They also helped promote the publishing of our conference papers through Dongda Publishing Corp. and the Greenwood Press, thus allowing the papers to receive attention from academic circles worldwide.

Currently, Prof. Fu Weixun was invited by Chuang Hui-Ming, the chief editor of Cheng Chung Books, to compile the book series, *The Study and Thought of Contemporary Academics (Dang dai xue ren*

xue si li cheng). I am honored that Prof. Fu selected my writings for submission to represent the Buddhist community and for the religious community to gain identity within academic circles. It is a true honor in my life. When I submitted my manuscript, I left out the preface due to my busy schedule. Now before publishing, in light of the editor's request, I have completed this preface after my trip to Mainland China, passing through Hong Kong, and on my way to America.

Master Sheng Yen
Rio Hotel, Hong Kong,
April 26, 1993



Chapter 1

Childhood and Youth

A Carefree Childhood

I was born in 1930, in Xiaoniang Harbor, near Wolf Hills, Nantong County, Jiangsu Province. I have no memory of my place of birth because in 1931, the great Yangzi River flood washed everything away while I was still an infant. Not only the properties, but also the land along the northern and southern banks of the river was all under water. As far as I can remember, the place where I was born was already under the Yangzi River, at a distance several miles from its banks.

According to my parents, our family, surnamed Chang, originally lived at the Jiao Pen Embankment on Chongming Island located at the delta of the mouth of the Yangzi River. From its name, one can tell it should be a swampy area near the sea. Due to a great flood, my great-great-grandfather moved to the Wolf Hills area near Nantong County. When I was born my family and close relatives all lived in the area of Nantong and Haimen. The dialect we used still retained the Chongming accent. After 1931 most of our family moved to Chang Yin Sha of Changshu County, though some distant relatives in Haimen County remained there. Thus, [the dire effects of] the flood as well as the need to relocate deeply affected my family's history and brought

tremendous suffering to our family.

Due to generations of moving and loss of home, we lacked the means to raise a large family of three-to-five generations, and we did not have the financial resources to build an ancestral hall. Although I had heard from my father that our family had a genealogy, I have never seen it. My father was illiterate, so he did not pay much attention to that kind of thing. At present, I only know that my grandfather is Chang Shifan, my grandmother's surname is Jiang, and my father is Chang Xuanchai, my mother's surname is Chen. Although once there was a *zhuang yuan* (top scholar) by the name Chang Chizi who came from our family, as for others, aside from having the surname of Chang, they have no kinship with my family.

After the Yangzi River washed everything away, my family moved to Jiangsu. My parents brought their six children, rented seven acres of land, built three thatched huts, and worked as tenant farmers and day laborers to sustain the family. I remember this during the Japanese invasion: due to the need for strategic [war] materials, in our countryside we planted a single crop of rice, mint, and beans, and then we alternated those crops with cotton each year. No matter what we planted, we never had enough to eat because the crops were used to pay the landlord and for army provisions. I was ten years old, had to work as a child laborer, and was drafted by the army to help build military structures. In this period it was said that "the masses live in dire poverty" and the people must face the misery of struggling to survive. I witnessed it but in the eyes of a child, there are not many worries or uneasiness when you think that life has always been like this. But later, hearing grownups relate and discuss historical events, I came to know that in the era of my birth China faced strong external rivalries, and was also torn by internal strife among the warlords. Most unfortunate was the Japanese

invasion, causing overall restlessness and turmoil in Mainland China. That was the unfortunate time I was born in, encountering the chaos of war.

Our family was impoverished, and in our countryside even the wealthy were poor because the whole country was poverty-stricken. Seeing our landlord's courtyard, I could tell they owned more properties, had more land, and had more provisions and clothing, but their quality of life was more or less the same as ours. At the time, it was said that there were three university graduates in Changshu County, and our landlord's son was one of them. Our countryside treated him as a modern *zhuang yuan*. However, in 1948, the landlord's family's fortunes soon deteriorated. To escape the turmoil and dangers of the countryside, and to seek refuge with their relatives in Shanghai, they rode in the same ordinary class railway car as my third eldest brother.

In my memory, there were no intellectuals in our Chang family. The conditions at the time prevented them from being literate and there was no schooling. I have three elder brothers and two elder sisters. Only my second eldest brother was roughly literate due to self-study and the other four were all illiterate. There were no public schools available at the time, only private schools and private tutelage schools. If the parents were to send their children to study, they would endure a double loss: the first being that the school required tuition fees and uniform expenditures, the second, when the children were at school they had no time to do chores at home, and that was a loss of manual labor. For an impoverished family like ours, it was simply unaffordable.

As a child I was feeble and mentally deficient. My body was often prone to illness because it is said that my mother was already 42 when she gave birth to me, and as a poor woman in the countryside, she didn't

have any milk to feed me. In addition the food at the time was coarse (poor in quality, lacking in nutrients) and scarce, so I was malnourished. As a child my growth was extremely slow; I did not learn to walk till I was three years old, or talk until I was five. When I was nine, my brothers and sisters had already grown up and helping my parents by earning money, so the family decided to send me to a private tutelage school. In my first class, four lines and twelve words were taught: “*Shang da ren / Kong yi ji / Hua san qian / Qi shi shi.*” However, I didn’t know their meaning. The tutor did not explain then that they meant: “The greatest man is Confucius; he taught three thousand students, and seventy became gentlemen.” This was the normal style of teaching of private tutelage schools.

I attended a total of four private tutelage schools for two reasons: first, the tutelage teacher’s classes didn’t survive very long, and second, my family could not consistently afford my tuition fees, so I needed to work to supplement my family’s income. I formally entered primary school when I was twelve. I began in the second semester of the third grade and completed fourth grade in the second year. Due to a poor yearly harvest our family was in wretched poverty, so I left school and went with my father and brothers to the Southern Bank of Yangzi River to build a dike for the new reclaimed land, and so I became a child laborer.

Juvenile without Regrets

In 1943, according to the Chinese [method of calculating age], I was already 14 years old. Actually, it wasn’t until December of the lunar calendar that year that I would turn thirteen. I left home [to become a monk] both willingly and compelled by conditions. There were no renunciants (people who leave home to join a monastery) in

our hometown, and no formal monastery. The religion we encountered was a kind of folk belief with a mixture of buddhas, deities, gods, and ghosts, the kind of social custom that treats Buddhist faith as the same as praying to gods, making offerings to ancestors, and worshiping ghosts. For example, when someone was ill, and the doctors couldn't cure them, the family would pray to the gods, buddhas, deities, or seek help from a children's medium or shamans. Although my old home was originally located at the northern bank of the Yangzi River, not far away from the Guang Jiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain, Nantong, I had no knowledge of Buddhist concepts and its essence. Occasionally, when the neighbors or relatives in the countryside were in bereavement, they would invite monks, Taoist priests, zhai gong (male practitioners) and zhai gu (female practitioners) to recite scriptures and perform repentance ceremonies. This was a local custom known as *zuo dao chang* (performing Taoist rites). As a child, it seemed to me that people had been like that since the beginning of time, and I was not able to tell whether this kind of custom was good or bad, proper or not.

However, the summer of that year there was a neighbor, Mr. Dai, who had just come back from his trip to Wolf Mountain in Jiangbei. Passing by our house, he encountered heavy rain and came in for shelter. When he saw me, he remembered that the abbot of Guang Jiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain had asked him to seek out a young man from the Jiangnan area [north of the Yangzi] to become a monk. He asked my mother about this, and in a joking manner, she turned to me: "Do you want to become a monk?" I had no thoughts and no idea about what being a monk meant, so I said, "Wonderful! Of course I would!" My mother was dumbfounded but she consented. She gave neighbor Dai my birth date so he could go to the abbot at Wolf Mountain, who would then ask for instructions in front of the

Buddha. That autumn, [after anxious waiting for a positive response from Wolf Mountain Monastery,] Mr. Dai and I traveled across the river and up the mountain [where I was to begin life as a monk].

Within Jiangsu Province, north of Yangzi River, the very north starts from Xu Zhou, and the south ends at Chong Ming. Other than Yuntai Mountain of Lianyung Harbor, just nine miles south of Nantong City, there are five mountains facing the Yangzi River. Their names from right to left [on the map] are Clay Mountain (Huang Ni Shan), Saddle Mountain (Ma An Shan), Wolf Mountain (Lang Shan) in the middle, followed by Sword Mountain (Jian Shan) and Military Mountain (Jun Shan). Among the five mountains, Wolf Mountain is the most majestic, and had been a natural military stronghold since ancient times. It also served as the sacred place for faithful pilgrimages of the people from the Su Bei district. The information and historical materials concerning Wolf Mountain can be found in two of my books—*The Journey Home*, and *Source of Dharma, Source of Life*, which includes a number of detailed accounts. The oldest source material, in four chapters, is *The Record of Wolf Mountain of the Five Mountains (Lang Wu Shan Zhi)* compiled by Fort Commander Wang Yang De in 1616. Currently, only the Library in the Beijing Guangji Monastery has a collection (No.683.21, 8113:1), and it is a copy of the 1935 printed edition from Guang Jiao Monastery on Wolf Mountain. When I was at Wolf Mountain, I saw that my grandmaster kept one collection; however, when I returned to Mainland China to visit Guang Jiao Monastery in 1988, this collection had already been lost.

The history of Wolf Mountain began during the period of Emperor Tang Gaozu between 661 and 669. There was a Master Seng Jia who came from Xiyu (in the western region) to establish a monastery at Wolf Mountain. Then Chan Master Zhi Huan, along with the local

lay Buddhists, built the Grand Buddha Hall and named it Guang Jiao Buddhist Temple. Even today the front Buddha Hall on the mountain has a statue of Master Seng Jia, and half way up the mountain there is a tower dedicated to Master Zhi Huan. Legend has it that Master Seng Jia passed away in 708 and that during his lifetime, he often performed miracles. He once manifested as the Eleven-Faced Guanyin Bodhisattva. This is why the later generations treated him as the incarnation of Guanyin. Emperor Tang Zhong Zong honored him as the Imperial Master, so his honorific title after his death was Great Imperial Master Grand Bodhisattva. His statue is in a sitting posture, wearing a Vairochana Buddha ritual crown and dressed in the Emperor's Great Dragon robe of the imperial court. It is rare to see such an example of a “non-sectarian monastic” in the Biographical Collection of Eminent Monks.

The monastic administration at Wolf Mountain underwent many changes, namely, from being an open-door monastery to a hereditary monastery with seven sects (mutual governance from divided sects). When I arrived at the mountain, it was under the sectarian era. The seven sects took turns each year to jointly manage the Grand Buddha Hall and the Great Saint Hall on the mountaintop. In 1943, it was our sect's turn, the Fourth Sect the Dharma Gathering Temple (Fa Ju An), to take care of the duties on the mountaintop.

According to Chinese monastic regulations, if the abbot is selected from monks who came from the “ten directions” [that is, not affiliated with that monastery,] then it is known as an open-door monastery. If the tonsure master [who transmits the precepts and shaves the head of disciples] passes on the monastery to his disciples and so on down, then it is called a hereditary monastery. The early monasteries, however, all belonged to the open-door category, which were supported

by government funding. Later, there were privately constructed monasteries and liberty in tonsure (not requiring government approval), so the small-scale monasteries developed into hereditary monasteries. Naturally, after being ruled by the state government, and especially after the 10-year Communist Cultural Revolution, Guang Jiao Monastery of Wolf Mountain combined the whole mountain into one monastery. Furthermore, all the monks within Nantong district were gathered at Guang Jiao Monastery. As a result, it was unlikely that Wolf Mountain would return to being a hereditary monastery any time soon.

My first impressions of Wolf Mountain were of the tall mountains and of the monastery filled with people. Since it was crowded with visitors, the monks were busy too. Because it was a pilgrimage monastery, tending to the incense at each Buddha Hall was an extremely engaging job, especially during the year that it was our turn to take care of the mountaintop. However, in the winter that year in Su Bei, random gunfights between the Communist New Fourth Army and the Japanese Army often broke out. The areas up and down the mountain all entered into a state of war. During daytime the Japanese Army would climb up the mountain to dig trenches for warfare. At nighttime the New Fourth Army, dressed in civilian clothes, would come to visit. The young gentries [living] near the foot of the mountain often disappeared or were found shot dead. As a result, the donations we received diminished day by day, and by the New Year of 1944, the mountain had become extremely lonesome and quiet.

I stayed at Wolf Mountain until October 1944, and then went to Shanghai [to a temple affiliated with Wolf Mountain, Dasheng]. I returned to Wolf Mountain in the spring of 1946, after which I went to Shanghai for a second time. Afterwards I never went back to Nantong. My stay at Wolf Mountain lasted less than two years. At the time of my

final departure, Wolf Mountain was occupied and encamped by the Nationalist Army, with only the troops left, no visitors, only weapons could be seen, and no relics to be found. The monastery doors, windows, tables, and chairs all became the beds and firewood for the army. Aside from a few monks in their sixties and seventies who were unwilling to wander elsewhere, the other monks all left Wolf Mountain. I witnessed the fall of Wolf Mountain from its flourishing to its decline, from its decline to its perishing. From this I became aware of the impermanence of things as taught by the Buddhadharmā, and I felt heart-stricken and helpless. Impermanence may cause flourishing to decline, but decline followed by perishing is not necessary. The world's survival depends on humanity, so I am still full of hope in the future of Buddhism.

My understanding and introspection into Buddhism began about half a year after I became a monk. Besides the elder generations—master, grandmaster, great grandmaster, and great-great grandmaster—that came at the right place and time to oversee my homework, they also enlisted two elderly teachers to help me with my studies. One of them taught me Daily Chan Liturgy every day, and the other taught me the Four Books and the Five Classics. The former was of course a monk; the latter had also been a monk at Wolf Mountain, but returned home [to lay life] after he passed the county imperial exam and became a scholar. The two of them were kind and earnest; not only did they teach me how to recite and memorize, but they also explained the content of the lessons. This led me to understand that the sutras were not only for the purpose of reciting to the dead for redeeming lost souls. Actually, they should be spoken to humanity and for us to follow their teachings. The Way of Confucius and Mencius could be used to guide the world, and the principles and methods of Buddhadharmā could be used to transcend the world. If the two work together as

sides of the same coin, world peace and a pure land on earth could be achieved. It is a shame that at the time, there was a serious shortage of talent among the Buddhist community, but there were many ritual monks who [mainly] performed ceremonies for the dead. Those who could speak the Dharma and guide the masses were extremely rare. The monks at Wolf Mountain more or less had several years of education, and some even became elementary school teachers. However, there was no one who could speak the Dharma, nor was there a venerable (monk) who was revered and respected by the public far and near. I myself had not thought about becoming someone like that. However, I did have an uncontainable wish, and that was to do my best to learn and understand the Dharma and to share it with other people.

Since I had no choice, my course of study was filled with shifts and turns and did not go smoothly. At Wolf Mountain, although I had two teachers, I also had to perform the duties of a young monk: besides the daily morning and evening services, ringing the bell and drum, cleaning the environment, sweeping the courtyard, and cleaning up the kitchen and lavatory. I was even growing vegetables, cooking, washing clothes for the old monks, and disposing the contents of the chamber pot. As a result, during that time, I learned all the skills and means a monk should have. Although it cost me time for studies, in terms of practical living, I learned the concepts and ability to “do everything on my own” and that “all jobs are equal.”

I arrived at the Dasheng Temple in Shanghai, which was a purely ritual and ceremonial monastery. Night and day, I would visit lay families to recite sutras, perform repentance ceremonies, conduct offering and sacrificial ceremonies for the dead, and to bestow blessings and long life for the living. There was no time to study and the temple did not have the financial resources to hire a tutor for me. At that time commodity

prices were rising, and the income from performing Buddhist rituals did not balance with the expenditures for maintaining the temple and daily needs. This made me think about the strong inter-relationship between the turmoil of the country and society and the stability of the lives of the people. A country and society is made up of people, so if the people's minds are restless, then society will be in chaos. If the society is in chaos then the country will be unstable. For the country to flourish and the people to live in peace, one must start by delivering the minds of humanity. And to deliver the minds of humanity, one must begin with education. This kind of education is not the ordinary lessons taught in school, but an emphasis on Buddhist faith; that is, using the concept of causes and conditions to console and encourage the minds of humanity. One could also say, "To know the past, observe the present consequence. To know the future, observe one's present conduct." So that everyone can abide by the law, do one's duty, do the best of one's share, persevere in effort, do not escape from reality, do not avoid responsibilities, face all problems, and use compassion and wisdom to correct and improve oneself. It is regretful that even though the Buddhadharma is so wonderful, yet because there were no talents to widely teach the Dharma, so very few people knew about it, and very many people misunderstood it, and even more people did not know how to use it to save the world and humanity.

Under such a motivation, for several years I asked my grandmaster many times to allow me to go for further studies. Thus, in the spring of 1947, I ended my small-temple life at the Dasheng, and started my new life as a transfer student at the Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery (Jing An) in Shanghai.

Tracing the history of the development of education by Buddhist monasteries began from the time of the Buddha. Wherever there is a

gathering of the sangha, there must be daily classes, that is, discussions and teachings on the precepts and sutras, as well as the practice of meditation. Therefore, every dharma center and every monastery is in fact a school. Especially Nalanda University at the time Master Xuan Zang traveled to India to study abroad [during the Tang Dynasty (618-907)]. He saw that it had nine monasteries, eighteen temples, covered an area of forty-eight miles, and was the largest and earliest comprehensive university in world Buddhist history. At the time, there were more than a thousand professors and tens of thousands of students doing research and studies on various sectarians. Sects such as the Yogachara, Madhyamaka, Mantra, Tantra and all sects of the Mahayana Buddhism were taught at the same time.

When Buddhism spread to China, Master Kumarajiva's translation bureau at the West Bright Pavilion (Ximing Ge) and the Free Garden (Xiaoyao Yuan), as well as Master Xuan Zang's translation bureau at the Great Compassion Monastery (Da Cien Si), gathered both the eminent monks and elites of the time. And during the course of translation of the sutras, classes on various courses were also simultaneously conducted. Until the Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties, the monasteries were often the place of academic study for scholars. Even the Academy of Learning for the Confucian School was studying under the same format as Chan Buddhist monastery courses. At the time of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), Buddhism began to decline for many reasons. First, the monastery placed no importance on education; second the intellectual elite opposed Buddhism, and finally after the upheaval of the Hong-Yang Rebellion of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Buddhist monasteries in the sixteen provinces of south-eastern China were almost completely devastated and in ruins. As a result, at the time of Emperor Qing Dezong, Guangxu

Period in 1898, the governor-general of Hu-Guang Provinces, Zhang Zhidong, wrote three chapters of *The Request for Education* (Quan Xue Pian) to pledge to Emperor Guangxu to adopt Chinese studies as the core and Western studies for application. He also sought to utilize the monastery properties for education purposes, taking away seventy percent of the monastery properties for the use of student dormitories and seventy percent of the monastery possessions for education funding. When the word spread, tens of thousands of Buddhist monasteries and hundreds and thousands of monks in the country were in a panic and a helpless situation. As a result, the abbot of several monasteries turned to the Japanese for help, requesting the Japanese government to negotiate with the Qing Dynasty officials by proposing their own plan for schooling. The first application was from the abbot of Tian Tong Monastery in Zhejiang province, he invited the Japanese Soto Sect Buddhist scholar Mizuno Baigyo, and founded the Hunan Sangha Institute (Hunan Seng Xuetang) in 1903. Later, in 1906, Master Wen Xi founded the Common Sangha Institute (Putong Seng Xuetang) at Tian Ning Temple, Yang Zhou. In 1908, the lay Buddhist Mr. Yang Wenhui (1837-1911) founded the Qi Huan Jing She (Jetavana Vihara) at the Nanjing Jinling Sutra Printing Society (Nanjing Jinling Ke Jing She). Although there were only ten or more lay and monk students, they were all prominent talents, such as Master Tai Xu (1890-1947), Master Zhi Guang (d.u.), Master Ren Shan (d.u.), and the lay students such as Ouyang-jingwu and Mei Guangxi. Due to financial difficulties, it lasted for only two years; however, its effect on the future of Chinese Buddhism after the Republic Year was far and profound.

The so-called Master Tai Xu style of sangha education and the Consciousness Only School of Ouyang Jingwu contributed to the nurturing of talents among the sangha, and talents for Buddhist studies

among the academics. Both of them were simultaneously developed from the system of Yang Wenhui, so some people revered Mr. Yang as the father of modern Chinese Buddhism. In 1947, when I enrolled in the Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery, there were more than forty known Buddhist Academies in the whole country. Some were closed after two or three years. They were unable to maintain the sources for teaching talents and students, and especially the financial resources for sustaining the monasteries.

The Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery was founded in the spring of 1946. At the time, the monastery was undergoing a dispute between two sects—the hereditary disciples and the monks from the ten directions. It turned out that the monks from the ten directions gained dominance, and they were determined to reform and reorganize education, winning the sympathy of public opinion. The teachers of this academy belonged to the second generation of Master Tai Xu.

At the time, the education level of the students in almost every Buddhist academy was unevenly distributed. The oldest students were thirty years old and some, like me, were only seventeen. Some students had been primary school teachers and some, like me, had only a fourth-grade primary school education level. The courses ranged from high school to university level. Math and English classes were junior high to high school level. Chinese classes were high school level, and Buddhist classes were university level. For example, *The Awakening of Mahayana Faith* (Dasheng Qixin Lun), *Sutra of the Bodhisattva Precepts of Brahma's Net* (Fan Wang Pusa Jie Jing), *Indian Buddhism History*, *Outline of the Eight Schools* (Ba Zong Gang Yao), *Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses* (Ba Shi Gui Ju Song) etc. The Buddhism courses were all university level, and the Buddhist studies

teachers also included university professors, so it was unclear what level we really belonged to.

Regarding these courses, other than Chinese, English and math, I didn't really understand them. When I was at Wolf Mountain, I learned Buddhadharma from the sutras and from chanting, and it was easier to understand. Now, the theoretical and rational shastras were commentaries written by philosophical masters after they developed their own understanding, organization, and elaboration. And there were many shastras with Sanskrit translations and particular Buddhist terms, so it is very difficult to fully comprehend them in a short period of time. As a result, in the first two to three months I thought about quitting school almost everyday. I wished I could understand sutras and comprehend Buddhadharma but after entering the Buddhist academy, I felt powerless and frustrated and didn't know where to begin. At the time, no one told us that Mahayana Buddhism in India had three systems: Yogachara, Madhyamaka, and Tathagatagarbha, and that Verses Delineating the Eight Consciousnesses (Ba Shi Gui Ju Song) belonged to the Yogachara system, and The Awakening of Mahayana Faith (Dasheng Qixin Lun) belonged to the Tathagatagarbha system, and what the differences were between them. The Mahayana Buddhism in China had eight systems: Vinaya (Lu), Consciousness Only (Fa Xiang), Three Treatises (San Lun), Tiantai, Avatamsaka (Hua Yen), Pure Land (Jing Tu), Chan, and Esoteric Buddhism (Mi). What were their differences and similarities? The teachers introduced them separately, and they didn't give a comprehensive comparison. This puzzled me. Why were there so many different views originating from the same Shakyamuni Buddha in India? Of course I believed that they were all true and correct, but which came first, and which was more profound? There should be some kind of explanation and justification!

I put my questions to an older student, recognized by others as having deep knowledge, and his answer was: “Don’t worry so much! We listen to what the teachers tell us, and then we say the same thing to the others! Otherwise, it would be too much, and you’ll get a headache!” This kind of answer demonstrated the learning atmosphere among the Buddhist community at the time, which still lagged in the traditional concept of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next. Aside from a few master level researchers, very few people had a sense of how to conduct comparative research.

So I stayed at the Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery for five consecutive semesters. In the honor roll of every semester exam, I ranked the top fifth or sixth among thirty students. This consoled me and it made me feel very grateful. The students at the Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery also had to perform Buddhist rituals and ceremonies in order to maintain our living expenditures and educational fees. The Buddhist educational foundation I have established is very closely related to my studies at the Buddhist Academy of Quiet Calm Monastery. Today, I still cherish the memory of life at the Buddhist Academy, and of the teachers and classmates that I once lived with. In the spring of 1988, I went back to Mainland China to visit my relatives. I also visited the Quiet Calm Monastery that had been restored after having been used as a warehouse by the government. The Main Buddha Hall in which we did our morning and evening services was already destroyed. Most of the teachers from that time already passed away. Only three of them are still alive: Master Ben Guang, who had been a professor at Jin Ling University, Master Yu Mei of Wolf Mountain, as well as Mr. Lin Zi Qing, author of *The Chronological Biography of Master Hong Yi* (Hong Yi Da Shi Nian Pu). However, I only met with Master Yu Mei. Among my

classmates, I only met three of them. I was deeply moved to see that everything had changed!

Between the spring and summer of 1949, there were about ten or more classmates and teachers who left Mainland China and came to Taiwan. Included are the already deceased Master Nan Ting, Master Dao Yuan, Master Bai Sheng, and Miao Ran, the current Chairman of Taiwan Zhi Guang College of Industry and Commerce, as well as Shou Cheng, the previous Director of the Taipei HuaYen Buddhist Lotus Society, and Master Ren Jun, who is currently residing in the United States. Among the classmates who left Mainland China, some are currently residing in a foreign country, some are spreading the Dharma, some have returned to lay life, and some have passed away. One [of these classmates] is Master Liao Zhong, who is the current Secretary General of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and is in preparation for founding the Xuanzang Industrial Institute. He has contributed greatly to the Taiwan Buddhist community for the past ten years, and I respect him greatly. He could be viewed as an honor to Quiet Calm Monastery.

My youth passed away in such wandering and relocation—becoming a monk, performing ritual ceremonies, studying, and being interrupted in schooling. In the summer of 1949 the situation was that of one war ending [the Japanese invasion] with another on the rise [the Communist revolution]. The Nationalist Army suffered defeat after defeat, and eventually withdrew from Mainland China and retreated to Taiwan. I reported to the recruitment station for young officers of the 207th Division on May 15, 1949. The second day, I went along with Master Liao Zhong, and carried with me some simple luggage and a few sets of monk's robes, shared a pedicab with him, and left the Buddhist Academy to report to the communication corps of the

Nationalist army, 207th Division.

People in the ancient times had the great aspiration “to lay down the pen and take up the sword,” and here we were, “shedding the robes of monks and putting on the military uniform.” However, we were still full of strong hope and faith, believing that after the Nationalist army arrived in Taiwan, after reorganization, they would one day return to Mainland China in the future, and let Buddhism shine again. So I still carried my monk’s robes with me. My body had always been feeble and prone to illness, so the classmates who remained at the Buddhist Academy mostly advised me, “Don’t be in such a hasty rush! According to your health and physical conditions, perhaps in the army, you would be burdened to death within three months. At that time, what use is it to talk about spreading Buddhadharma, protecting the country and Buddhism?” Fortunately, when I asked for leave from teacher Mr. Lin Zi Qing, he said: “May you grow firm and strong by being tested in an era such as this!” And under such a belief, I have been growing strong until now, I am very grateful for his words of encouragement.

At the time, I had just turned twenty, but according to the Western way of calculating age, I was not yet eighteen. From becoming a monk at fourteen and joining the army at twenty, to me, these short five and a half years lasted as if they were half a century. From being a country boy who knows nothing, transformed into a young monk, then transformed again to become a young soldier, I experienced much, learned much, and have grown much. To me, that time of my life was both the years of worries and the first golden era. It is worth memorizing, remembering, and cherishing, so it is “toil without complaint” and “pain with no regret.”

Chapter 2
Sample Text



The Chronicle

- 1930** Born in Jiangsu Province, China.
- 1943** Becomes a novice at Guangjiao Monastery, Nantong, Jiangsu province.
- 1949** Joins the army and arrives in Taiwan from Shanghai during Chinese Civil War.
- 1959** Ends his 10-year service in the army, and is re-ordained by Venerable Master Dongchu.
- 1961** Begins his six-year solitary retreat at Chaoyuan Monastery in Kaohsiung.
- 1969** Begins his studies at Rissho University in Tokyo, Japan and earns doctorate in Buddhist Literature in 1975.
- 1975** Heads to the States to spread the Dharma.
- 1977** Returns to Taiwan taking over the reins of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture and Nung Chan Monastery by Ven. Master Dongchu's will.
- 1978** Receives Dharma transmission of the Linji lineage from Venerable Master Lingyuan.
- 1979** Establishes a monastery in New York named Chan Meditation Center.
- 1980** Ordains first group of disciples in Taiwan, marking the beginning of the DDM Sangha.
- 1985** Establishes the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in Beitou, Taipei.
- 1989** Establishes Dharma Drum Mountain.
- 1992** Proposes Protecting the Spiritual Environment as the core DDM vision.
- 1997** Sets up the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in Pine Bush, New York. Attends the 11th International Meeting People and Religions in Padua, Italy and meets with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican.

- 1998** Holds a dialogue with the Dalai Lama in New York City, titled “In the Spirit of Manjushri: The Wisdom Teachings of Buddhism”.
- 1999** Proposes the Fivefold Spiritual Renaissance Campaign: A lifestyle for the 21st century.
- 2000** Attends and makes a keynote speech at the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held at the UN headquarters in New York.
- 2001** Establishes the Dharma Drum Sangha University in Taiwan.
- 2002** Attends the World Economic Forum in New York as a Buddhist leader, donates and escorts the Akshobhya Buddha head statue, stolen in 1997, back to Four Gate Pagoda in Shandong province, China.
- 2003** Makes a speech at the meeting for the World Council of Religious Leaders at the UN headquarters in NY at the invitation of the UN secretary Kofi Annan. Travels to Israel and Palestine with representative leaders from WCRL for religious peace movement.
- 2004** Attends the Seminar on Preventing Terrorism held by WCRL in New York.
- 2005** Attends Leaders’ Meeting on Faith and Development organized by the World Bank in Dublin, Ireland. Receives honorary doctorate degree from Mahachulalongkorn-rajabhidyalaya Buddhist University, Thailand. Inauguration for the DDM World Center for Buddhist Education takes place.
- 2006** Leads a delegation of 15 DDM youth leaders to attend the UN Global Youth Leadership Summit at the UN headquarters in New York.
- 2007** Establishes Dharma Drum Buddhist College in Taiwan established the Sheng Yen Professorship in Chinese Buddhism at Columbia University, New York. Initiates the Six Ethics of the Mind campaign. The Taipei County Jinshan Eco-friendly Memorial Garden starts operation.
- 2009** Passes away on February 3rd. Receives posthumous honors from the President of R.O.C.

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What I am unable to accomplish in this lifetime,
I vow to push forward through countless future lives;
what I am unable to accomplish personally,
I appeal to everyone to undertake together.

— Master Sheng Yen (1930-2009)

