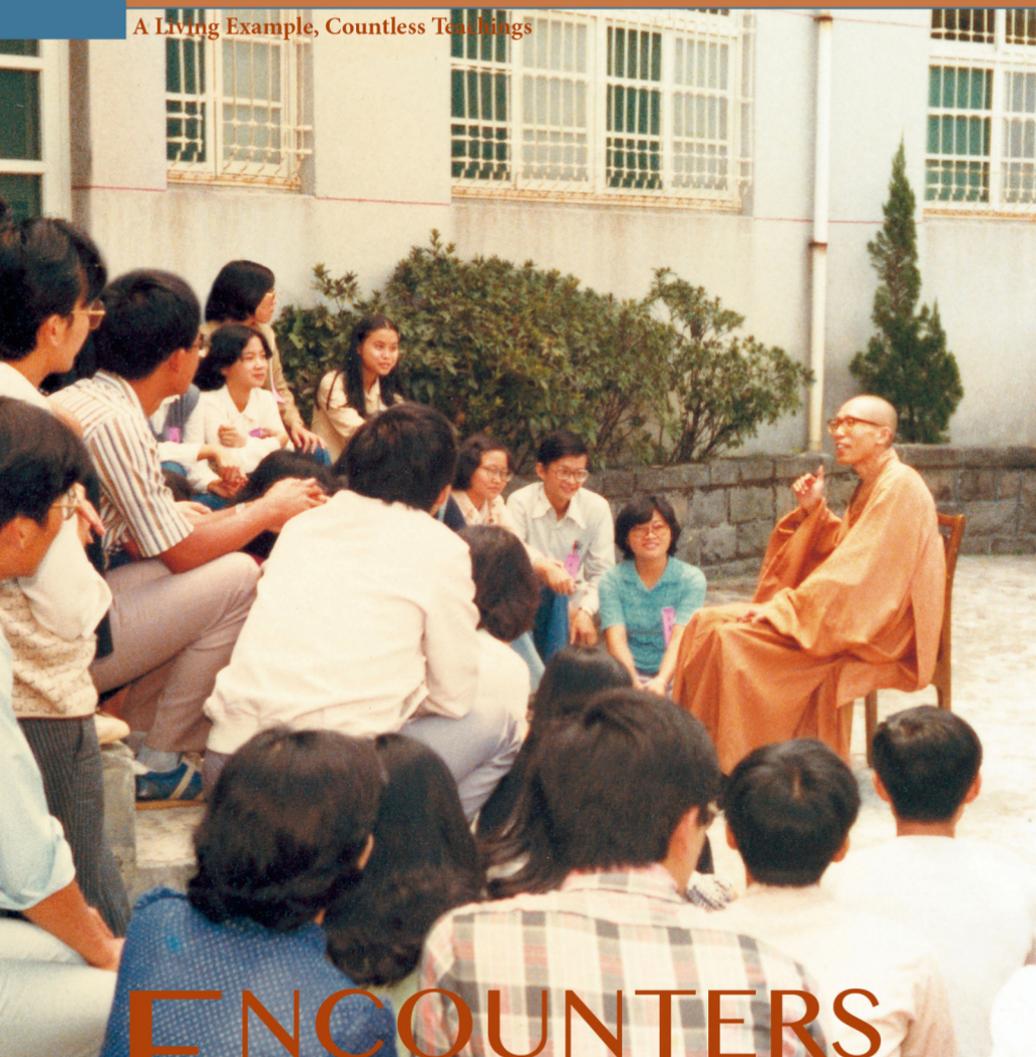


Pocket Guides to Buddhist Wisdom

A Living Example, Countless Teachings



# ENCOUNTERS *with* Master Sheng Yen ☒

ENCOUNTERS  
*with* Master  
Sheng Yen x

## **Encounters with Master Sheng Yen X**

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## Preface

To share with the public the thoughts and life experiences of Dharma Drum Mountain founder Master Sheng Yen (also known as Shifu, meaning “Master”), the Sheng Yen Education Foundation embarked on a series of talks beginning in September of 2009. Fifty-two talks were given at the Sheng Yen Lecture Hall (located in the official residence where Master Sheng Yen lived in his final years). The talks were titled *A Living Example, Countless Teachings—Encounters with Master Sheng Yen* and we invited all his monastic and lay disciples to share with us their stories about Shifu, how he taught them through his living example and words. Listening to these speakers’ personal accounts of the interactions between teacher and student allowed the audience to commemorate Master Sheng Yen’s journey, and once again hear his gracious teachings.

The talks include stories of Master Sheng Yen’s everyday life, how he would give detailed guidance to his disciples regarding their speech and actions. There are also accounts of his travels to share the Buddhadharma locally and overseas, reaching out to the public, and teaching them skillfully and flexibly based on the existing circumstances. Even in his later

years when he became quite ill, he was an example of how to face life and death with freedom and ease. All of these examples, no matter how small the story or how short the conversation, radiate Shifu's compassion and wisdom. They inspire us to vow to "Emulate the worthies and sages, practice what the Dharma has taught us, and repay through our heartfelt gratitude."

At the end of the series, we felt that the interactions from these true life stories were brimming with the Dharma spirit. Hence the audiences initiated and organized transcripts of the talks, to be compiled and published, hoping to allow the general public to learn from the wisdom of Master Sheng Yen, so that together we can realize his vision to create a pure land on this earth.

Many of Master Sheng Yen's early disciples in Chan practice, both from the West and East, also have their inspirational experiences to share regarding his model and teachings. Therefore, through interviews their stories have been edited and included as well.

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# Preparing Ourselves for the Following Generations to Come

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Du Zhengmin

*To be part of the efforts for digitizing Buddhist information is to pave the way for the following generations.*

*If we fail to complete the fundamental construction regarding Buddhist resources for learning and study, they will find it difficult to access Buddhist teachings.*

*This is a very important step. At a later stage, what I've committed to do is mostly about digitization of Buddhist information.*

*This is also part of my effort to learn from the Master: to prepare an environment for the next generations.*



## **Introducing the Speaker**

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### **Du Zhengmin**

Du Zhengmin was born in Yuanli, Miaoli County, Taiwan in 1952. In 1978 he attended the Buddhist lecture series for college students organized by Shandao Temple in Taipei, and met Master Sheng Yen for the first time. Afterwards, he attended a seven-day Chan retreat at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture. In 1987 he entered the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. The Master once said to him that he would achieve great success by becoming either a Buddhist monk or lay Buddhist scholar. He had served as Director of the Library and Information Center at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, Vice-President of Dharma Drum Buddhist College, and Vice Chairman of Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA). He died of cancer in November, 2016.

**A**t Dharma Drum Mountain, many people often address me as “teacher.” Actually, what I’ve learned is limited, and I’ve contributed only little. It’s just that I’ve been at DDM for a relatively longer time. That’s all. It’s nothing really special.

In 1987, I became a graduate student at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, which was founded in 1985. After graduation, I was offered a teaching position at the Institute, and have taught there for nearly 30 years, which is a rare experience. I often jokingly say that I was forced to live in an ivory tower by Master Sheng Yen, spending my days accompanied by Buddhist texts and literature, which I nevertheless consider a lucky thing.

Over the past dozen years, thanks to new technology, we’ve worked to complete special projects such as the digitization of Taisho Tripitaka, Manji Tripitaka Sequel (Wan Xu Zang Jing), and the Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen. Recently, we have started to construct a digital database and archive dedicated to Master Sheng Yen. I hope that based on this foundation, in the future readers

and researchers will be able to grasp the key points of Master's thought and teaching in a faster timeframe.

To be part of the efforts for digitizing Buddhist information is to pave the way for the following generations. Since the learning tools for the following generations will be totally different, so if we fail to complete the fundamental construction regarding Buddhist resources for learning and study, they will find it difficult to access Buddhist teachings. This is a very important step. At a later stage, what I've committed to do is mostly about digitization of Buddhist information. This is also part of my effort to learn from the Master: to prepare an environment for the next generations.

## Meeting the Master in my wandering years

Towards the end of 1977, the Master returned to Taiwan from the USA, and developing Buddhist education marked the beginning of Master Sheng Yen's effort to spread the Dharma. First of all, in 1978, the Master took up the position as Director of the Chung-Hwa Institute of

Buddhist Culture at the China Academy, and in the same period of time started to host seven-day meditation retreat at the Institute of Buddhist Culture. In 1979, he set up the Academy of Three Learnings at Nung Chan Monastery. This showed that academic education, actual practice, and building a sangha were the focus of the Master's endeavor in developing Buddhist education. Nonetheless, the fermentation, development, and maturing of ideas, as well as their implementation, always take time to accumulate, indicating an elongated journey in and of itself.

How I met the Master for the first time was indeed very interesting. In 1978, I attended the Association of the Republic of China's Buddhist Lecture Series for College Students Buddhist lecture series, where I saw the Master for the first time. The Buddhist lecture series was organized by Ven. Dao An, which first took place at Sung Shan Temple and later at Shandao Temple, Taipei. At that time I was a regular visitor at Shandao Temple, not because I was particularly interested in Buddhism, but because they provided nice vegetarian food there. In October of 1978, the Master gave a lecture there at invitation of the

Association. During the lecture the Master announced the news that he was going to organize and lead a seven-day meditation retreat, so I happily signed up and went on the retreat, just like that.

At that time I was in my early 20s. When I was in my 20s and 30s, I often couldn't really remember my age, as if time had stopped at the point when I was 13 years old, the year of my father's death. It's just that in the past I had never really noticed this influence on me. So I guess it was probably when I was 25, or 26 years old, that I met the Master for the first time. At that time I was already experiencing a "wandering" lifestyle.

By "wandering" I mean that I was influenced by Hermann Hesse's novel, *Siddhartha*. In that situation, I was always searching the meaning of life but without a particular goal and a clear direction, and neither did I have a steady job. For a period of time I taught at separate schools for a living, and served as volunteer counselor at Taiwan Lifeline International. This pretty much sums up my life when I was younger.

To some extent, young people at that time were at the crossroads exploring the way, from western culture back to eastern culture. By learning the Guzheng, Guqin, or Chinese zither, practicing Taichi, and studying Buddhism, I tried to find my path back to the Eastern approach. At that time, having little notion about Buddhism, I went to several Buddhist temples. What impressed me the most once was when I went to the Huayen Lotus Association to listen to Venerable Nanting's Dharma talk. But because he spoke in such heavily accented Chinese, plus the fact that I knew little about Buddhism, I could hardly understand it.

As a wanderer, I had the opportunity to hear the Master's Dharma talk, and attend the first seven-day meditation retreat organized by the Master when he had just returned to Taiwan. As to what Buddhist study and seven-day mediation was all about, I had completely no idea. I remember when the Master asked me what Buddhist sutras and texts I had read, and I said I had read none of them. The Master then said, "That's daring of you!" The Master probably thought it was intriguing, that somebody would actually come to do a retreat just like

that, without knowing anything about Buddhist practice.

On the concluding day of the retreat, the Master shed some tears, which touched me. He said, “The Dharma is so wonderful, but so few people actually know about it.” These words may sound familiar to many people now, but it was the first time I had ever heard him say so. I was both shocked and moved, to see that much as strict and stern as he was at the meditation hall, the Master actually shed tears on the final day. This shows his compassionate mind dedicated to Buddhist teachings.

## Entering the gate of Chan practice at the Master’s encouragement

I gained a lot of insight and experienced good feelings in that retreat. Simply speaking, it changed my views about Buddhist teaching and inspired me to become really interested in the Dharma. Another positive result was that I began to be able to understand ancient Chinese texts. I used to read the *Great Learning*, but couldn’t see beyond its literal meaning. After the retreat, when I read it again,

I found it was actually very much in line with the essence of Chan practice. At that time I wasn't very clear about the overall context of Confucianism and Buddhism, at most I just had a vague idea that the *Great Learning* also touched upon spiritual practice. With the experience of the meditation retreat, I then realized that it was more than the written language. My faith in the Dharma was thus inspired. Afterwards, I went to National Taiwan University to sit in some classes trying to teach myself, which later prompted me to delve into Buddhist studies. All this was thanks to that retreat.

Some day after the retreat, when I returned to the Institute of Buddhist Culture to see the Master, he asked me if I would like to have lessons with him at the China Academy. At that time the Master was teaching doctoral candidates at the Academy. There were only three or four students there. One course was the *Prologues to the Various Interpretations of the Source of Chan (Chanyuan-zhuquan-jidou-xu)*. Now I can finally remember it well. At that time, I even had no idea how the title means. In the same period of time, the Master gave several public lectures on Buddhism,

for which he asked me to transcribe the content of the tapes into articles. Later, two of them were included in the Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen, and the name of the person who helped sort out the text was also kept at the end of the article.

I seldom mentioned that after the retreat the Master actually asked me if I would be interested in becoming a Buddhist monk. He even wrote me a letter after he went back to the US. But in the end I still chose to run away, and did not go to study at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies right after its establishment. Nonetheless, I still kept on teaching myself Buddhism, mainly through two channels.

One was through libraries. In early days the Cardinal Tien Library of Taipei Ricci Institute had a huge collection of books and publications on Sinology, with a rich information base on Buddhism selected from the perspective of Sinology. This was one of the channels through which I taught myself. In addition, I also sat in some classes on Buddhism, including Indian Philosophy taught by Professor Ye Ayue at National Taiwan University, and

the Study of Agama, taught by Yang Yuwen at Linh Son Institute of Buddhist Studies, among other places. At the time, these were the primary Buddhist courses on Indian Buddhism. The expertise of these two teachers indeed helped me lay a solid foundation for studying the history of Indian Buddhist philosophy.

In 1985, Venerable Heng Qing, who had just obtained her PhD from the University of Wisconsin, was recruited by National Taiwan University Department of Philosophy, and started teaching on the thought of tathāgatagarbha in college. Her style of teaching featured clear, logical, and sequential instruction, which helped me generate a great interest in the thought of tathāgatagarbha and grasp the principle of Buddhist studies. Afterwards, I also went on to sit in classes offered by Yang Huinan, on Jizang (549–623) and the Chan school, classes by Yang Zhenghe, on Huayan Buddhism, and classes by Zhang Ruiliang, on Tiantai Buddhism, among others on Chinese Buddhism.

With several years of self-taught knowledge, I was once rather proud of myself and arrogantly wrote an

essay on Buddhist studies, which I later presented to Master Sheng Yen in person, and asked him if it could be published in the *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies*. The Master accepted my essay somewhat reluctantly, and said that he would ask other teachers to give it a review. Then he asked me if I would like to study at the Institute of Buddhist Studies. In my impression, the Master had two opinions of me: I should either become a Buddhist monk, or engage in academic research. He once said to me, “You can definitely become an outstanding scholar in the future.” I was actually surprised to hear that, because at that time I wasn’t really keen on studying, but was only interested in having fun and exploring.

But what really prompted me to make the decision to study at the Institute was when Ven. Heng Qing asked me directly by saying, “Do you want to study at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies?” In fact, when the Master first asked me the question, it already prompted me to consider going back to formal education. But it was the Ven. Heng Qing’s encouragement that made me realize that I had to grasp the opportunity before it was too late.

At that time I was already 35 years old, which was the age limit for a place at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. So if I didn't seize the opportunity, there probably wouldn't be another chance.

## Chinese Buddhism to connect to the world

I was very fortunate to be able to become a student at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies in 1987, learning from the Master and developing at DDM.

At the time in Taiwan, the Institute of Buddhist Studies was a very special learning environment. The Master had always put great emphasis on language training. Once, in a talk to Buddhist devotees, he said proudly to the audience, "Our students probably have read more books than some medical students, and work harder than they do, even though our degrees are not formally recognized." Indeed, in early times the students at the Institute were fully aware that they would not get a formal academic degree, but they were happy to be able to learn Pali and Sanskrit, two

languages in the Buddha's time. In addition to valuing the languages to study original Buddhist texts, the Master also stressed language skill training for academic purposes. It was mainly English and Japanese, but he also encouraged students to learn French and German, among others.

The Master developed an international perspective from his own learning experiences, which reveals itself in the Institute's school motto, especially in the first line: Connect to the world based on Chinese Buddhism. With that, he urged students to broaden their vision and capacity of mind. In early days, though still limited in its resources, the Institute was still able to nurture some 10 or 20 students who later went abroad for further study and eventually obtained PhD degrees, which was indeed no easy feat. I often travelled abroad to attend conferences and met foreign teachers at some prestigious schools, which prompted me to recommend our students to go there to study. This was because our students had a solid foundation in language skill training, and, as a natural advantage, had a better grasp of Chinese Buddhist texts than students from the west. In addition, they had been well trained academically

so they would be welcomed by international academic circles for Buddhist studies.

Looking back at the early stage of the Institute of Buddhist Studies, it was like laying the foundation. Its teaching faculty, students, and system had gradually gained international recognition. At that time we were also reflecting on ourselves, about the fact that, compared to other Buddhist seminaries in Taiwan, our courses on Buddhist doctrines were indeed insufficient. Nonetheless, I still think that it would be risky for students to just go directly into the research of doctrines while lacking a good training in language skill. If one wants to engage in Buddhist research, one should first hone one's language skills.

## **Educational blueprint: ideal and construction going forward simultaneously**

The Dharma Drum Mountain World Center for Buddhist Education, now located in Jinshan, in the northern coast of Taiwan, had to do with the relocation

of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. At that time the construction project was named “Relocation Project for the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies.” In 1989, the Master first found this piece of land in Jinshan, and consecutively acquired other adjacent pieces of land thanks to favorable conditions, helping the further development of its educational ideals.

I recall in the early 1990s when the Master, accompanied by the Institute’s teaching faculty and students, went up the mountain to investigate the land. I saw the Master holding his cane pointing here and there afar, confidently planning possible sites for the library, buildings of teachings, and international conference hall to be built in the future. But what lay before us was actually nothing but the mountain as it originally was. There was a little brook at the front of what is now the Library and Information Center. We sat there with our feet soaking in the brook water, happily listening to the Master joyfully describe the educational blueprint in his mind.

In 1990, the first Chung-Hwa International Conference

on Buddhism was held, and later it was changed to a biannual conference, which was historically significant for the further development of the Institute and DDM's international endeavors. Inviting heavy-weight international scholars to Taiwan for academic exchanges on Buddhist teachings and doctrines and listening to their advice on developing DDM proved to be a positive influence for DDM's prospect in light of the international environment at that time.

Before the buildings at DDM World Center for Buddhist Education were officially open, the biggest event on the Mountain was the foundation laying ceremony and the "underground palace treasure settlement" ceremony in October of 1996. Located right beneath the Main Buddha Hall, the treasure trove for storing contemporary Buddhist materials as an archive has a collection of over 300 items dedicated to the Dharma deemed as a treasure for DDM. It was built to last at least 1000 years. What is worth mentioning is that the treasure includes a CD-Rom of Taisho Tripitaka that contains Buddhist texts in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, and Chinese. Our idea was to keep a record of

the Tripitaka circulated in Taiwan's society in late 20th and early 21st century. At that time academic circles were already building a digital database for Buddhist studies. The Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA), an effort to produce and release the digital CD-Rom that contains the entire Tripitaka, was not established until 1998.

## Digital era leads to the transformation of Buddhist text circulation

CBETA was indeed a project highly anticipated in international academic circles. Its origin can be traced back to 1994, when Ven. Heng Qing established the Center for Buddhist Studies at National Taiwan University, where Buddhist scholars and experts were invited to participate in the construction of a systemized Buddhist database by combining contemporary academic research methods and modern technology. At that time, the main focus was on the research of secondary literature, namely, by sorting out the available research results of the time. I was also part of the team.

Toward the end of 1997, Ven. Heng Qing finally obtained the support from the Yin Shun Foundation and successfully raised the money for the establishment of CBETA. But given that CBETA was not intended to be supported by one single source, it was hoped that the Buddhist circles could work together to produce it. On the evening of February 13, 1998, Li Zhifu, director of Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, Ven. Hui Min, and I, went to Nung Chan Monastery to report this project to the Master. He encouraged this greatly and agreed that it would be better that more groups and individuals work jointly to realize the project and so the result could be shared by all. With the Master's positive feedback, the Institute of Buddhist Studies therefore became actively engaged in the project. On February 15, the establishment ceremony for CBETA took place at DDM Anhe Branch Monastery, Taipei.

The first five years of the budget for CBETA was supported by Yin Shun Foundation. Later a devotee from Singapore through the Master's introduction continued to support the project. Thanks to these two conditions, for

CBETA, although not affiliated to DDM, DDM had put in a lot of resources and technical support, through its early-day Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, Dharma Drum Institute of Buddhist Study and Practice, Dharma Drum Buddhist College, all the way up to our current Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts. The effort has never stopped.

Personally I feel that it was an important timing to establish the CBETA. In historic terms, any project has its initial version and improved edition. But at least the current CBETA represents a successful transformation, as well as wonderful memory for our times.

For example, when CBETA's Taisho Tripitaka CD-Rom was just released, we received an email from a Chinese user from Mainland China, who expressed that he had always wanted to read the Tripitaka but had lacked access. He finally got to fulfill his dream when a Buddhist monk had informed him of the CBETA. It took him five years to read through the Chinese Tripitaka included in the CBETA, which is not easy at all. He appreciated CBETA

very much, and said that without the circulation of the digital Buddhist texts, reading through the Tripitaka would have remained a distant dream for him.

In early years when we visited the Silk Road, we received similar feedback. At that time, the only one single set of Taisho Tripitaka available throughout the Silk Road was kept in the Dunhuang Research Academy. Even if some researcher had discovered some information at some cave, he or she still had to return to Dunhuang Research Academy to conduct comparisons. That would involve the enormous costs of transportation and time. When they obtained the Taisho Tripitaka CD-Rom, they were incredibly happy. In around 2000, all people needed was a notebook computer, which would be the same as carrying a whole set of Tripitaka with them.

It was even more useful to scholars around the globe. I often had to travel to research institutions in Europe to do research on ancient Buddhist scrolls. It was like playing puzzles, where you have to put the pieces together before comparing it to the original text, which is even harder.

Since the emergence of the electronic Buddhist texts, all you need to do is type in some key words online and find the relevant original text online. That really proved to be a lot more convenient. Researchers can then restore the original information. This is the contribution of CBETA for our time.

It is essential for our generation to gather the data in a comprehensive manner and process it in a correct way, including the usage of data tagging and metadata, in order to help the next generations of researchers to do further exploration and correction. This is the future trend, and we can foresee its coming. For example, in doing the biographies of the eminent monks, we have successfully linked up their networks throughout the history, which would be hard to imagine for users in the past when they simply had to sort out the information in a manual way. In the future, researchers will be able to continue further exploration based on all this available information, which I believe will lead to fresh discoveries.

## Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen as a gate to the Tripitaka

In 2002 the CD-Rom version of Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen was first released, which represented another main project by the Buddhist Network Information Office of the Institute of Buddhist Studies after digitizing the Tripitaka. At the time when I promised to take up the project, I had reported to the Master about the reason why the digitization was necessary. To my understanding, the Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen is like a smaller edition of Buddhist text collection. The Master's works are often based on Buddhist texts. It's just that to make it easy for people, the Master would use everyday language to explain the seemingly difficult ideas. But it's a pity that readers often tend to therefore fail to pay attention to the texts where his words are based on.

In fact, when the digitization of Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen was completed, we did research on how Buddhist texts were cited in the Works. We discovered that from the Indian works and Chinese works as recorded in

volume one through to volume 55 of the Taisho Tripitaka included in the CBETA, the Master had actually cited passages from 54 volumes out of the 55 volumes. The reason why the Master left one volume without quoting from it was that it contains altogether four parts and since the Master only used passages from three parts of it, leaving the other part out because it had nothing do with his research. In other words, the Master had cited almost the whole Indian Works and Chinese Works in the Taisho Tripitaka. We often have a feeling in doing digitization of Buddhist information, that although the Tripitaka is so wonderful, but how are we going to make use of it? The Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen serves as a ideal gate of entrance, through which one can access the Tripitaka in a systematic way, because the Master had prepared a perfect guide for us.

## The true meaning of education lies in universally inspiring all

Master Sheng Yen made Chung-Hwa Institute for Buddhist Education as his base for education. From an

international research institution, it has now developed into a global world center for Buddhist education, and has come a long way down the road over the past 20 or 30 years. But finally a complete and comprehensive institution has been established. The whole process can be a source for reflection.

The Institute in the era of Institute of Buddhist Culture featured an independent educational environment and a teaching faculty mostly recruited from outside the Buddhist community. It had a valuable atmosphere of academic exchange, with an advantage of nurturing scholars, one after another. In his late years, however, the Master emphasized Chinese Buddhism more, perhaps out of the consideration that Buddhist education is more than simply intellectual study and should be infused with more religious sentiment. Therefore, after the relocation of the Institute to Dharma Drum Mountain, it has since developed another framework and style.

In April 8, 2007, the Dharma Drum College of Buddhist Study and Practice was formally established,

a college that stressed both intellectual study and actual practice, and one that was recognized by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, a transformation that the Master was happy to witness. On the day when the College was inaugurated, the Master couldn't hide his excitement and said, "This is my happiest day." Then, to combine academics, practice, and Dharma center, DDM's Buddhist education had further expanded, and started to develop the idea of a center complex for comprehensive Buddhist education.

In 2008, Dharma Drum College of Buddhist Study and Practice was renamed to Dharma Drum Buddhist College. This marked another transformation in that it started to include social issues such as Buddhist studies and information, Buddhist studies and technology, Buddhist studies and its application in daily life. These are all newly developed projects, which seek to maintain the original academic level while exploring new frontiers at the same time.

In 2014, Dharma Drum Buddhist College merged with Dharma Drum College of Humanities and Social

Sciences and became the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts, marking an expansion based on this model. If we can move steadily in this direction, then perhaps we will be able to stay much closer to Master Sheng Yen's ideal in Buddhist education, that is, Buddhist education as a fundamental education by starting with academic education while not stopping at the academics. On one hand it reaches out to connect with the public in society; on the other hand it encourages people to practice and apply what they have learned in real life situations. In other words, DDM's Extensive Academic Education is certainly important, but it has to work seamlessly with the Extensive Public Buddhist Education and Extensive Social Care Education programs, in order to develop and diversify, and perform its basic, general educational function. The Institute of Liberal Arts already has reached this consensus, but it is still exploring and still needs to accumulate more practical experience.

In recent years I've often been involved in devotee training programs, where I would share my own experience based on this same reflection. It included the Eight-Form

Moving Meditation instructors training programs, where I received the same training as everybody else so that I could join the promotion effort. By joining local communities and understanding devotees' needs, I was engaged in a fresh way of learning, totally different from doing academic research.

Long time ago when I traveled to Japan to attend meetings, I discovered that scholars in Japan shared a common feature. Some might be scholars at a college, but they were also Dharma teachers at their temples. Once I attended a conference that featured the combination of academic study and Zen practice, where a famous senior scholar was also present. He dressed in a formal suit in an academic occasion, and would wear a Buddhist monk's robe when participating in Zen practice events. I was very impressed at that time, and realized that my ideal model was a Buddhist scholar who can perfectly integrate academic study and actual practice. Therefore I thought that every Dharma teacher, if possible, should get in touch with people in different communities and try to understand their needs. But I didn't really start to change until 2006.

## Exploring the treasure mountain to prepare for the next generations

I'm grateful that I've been at DDM for 30 years, which has enabled me to further understand the Master's ideals and gradually internalize what I've understood into actual practice. This is all about an eventual process of immersion and transformation. Actually, I didn't have many opportunities to interact with the Master; even if there was any, these always occurred as just simple occasions, where I was able to learn something by following the Master's example.

The Master was committed to the educational system; he valued ethics and showed much respect towards teachers, in a degree that I admire a lot. What impressed me the most was when I was hospitalized some 10 years ago, in 2005. I got a phone call from the Master on the very day I was discharged from hospital. At that time the Master was still hospitalized himself. Before hanging up the phone I asked the Master to take good care, and he said, "Indeed. I should take care of myself. And you should take good care of yourself too." He was always so mindful and caring.

Even suffering illness himself, he never forgot to show care to others. I think this is what marks his example: to take benefiting others as the priority.

In early days when the Master wasn't as busy and occupied, he would present gifts to each and every of the teachers at the Institute, genuinely showing equality towards us. Even at that time I was still "no body," the Master still made an effort to show his care. In short, I felt I wasn't good enough to deserve the gift that year. Nevertheless, I admire the Master for how he showed appreciation towards the teachers. The way he demonstrated respect to teachers is what we should keep in mind and learn well. Later when I became the director myself, I also followed suit and would express my gratitude to the teaching faculty.

Because of my position, I spent a lot of my time on Dharma Drum Mountain. I am grateful to the Master for building such a nice environment for Buddhist education. As the Master often said, "Where there is the Buddha's teaching, that is a school." I remember in October of 2005, when Dharma Drum Mountain was inaugurated, an

interesting thing happened. I was in charge of receiving international religious teachers as our special guests. Although people were supposed to participate in silence all through the event, our foreign guests obviously didn't understand that policy and were enthusiastically engaged in conversations. I was curious what they were actually talking about, and found out that it was about "the Buddha's smile"—they found the smile of the three Buddha statues in the Main Buddha Hall so very lovely. From then on I've learned to add one more stop to my itinerary whenever I go to Dharma Drum Mountain: to pay respect to the Buddha at the main Buddha Hall, and smile to the Buddha, learning how the Buddha smiles.

Another stop is the Founding History Memorial Hall, where I recite the Inauguration Verse written by the Master, which says: "The meaning of inauguration is to explore every individual's treasure mountain within. It is about how to develop our wisdom and compassion, to jointly bring harmony, peace, happiness, and wellbeing to our society and world. This is a never-ending task. As long as there is one more person being born, there is one more

person's inner treasure mountain to be explored. Therefore, it is an infinite treasure trove, an inexhaustible treasure mountain." Every day when I go past there, it is like receiving a blessing. This also means that our mission as an individual is to open up and explore our own treasure mountain, and also help others open up and explore their inner treasure mountain. This is a never-ending task. Dharma Drum Mountain may have been inaugurated, and Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts may have started to recruit students, but that doesn't mean our mission is accomplished. On the contrary, our work has just begun, because there are still many things we should reflect on ourselves, as well improve ourselves and plan further, and that is a never-ending task.

On November 1, 2015, the rally for DDM's global devotees was held on Dharma Drum Mountain. The participants of the event that day were mostly supporters for the 5475 Fundraising Project—a great vow to advance Buddhist education. It is through their individual efforts to save five NT dollars every day that the establishment of Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts was finally

achieved. I shed tears while taking photos of them, feeling all the more grateful. It is thanks to these people that we have such a wonderful venue today. And what we should reflect on is: From today on, what are the things we can do to help? That is, what can we do today for the next generation? Let us start off today, and work together to make it happen.

*(The original Chinese text was compiled and edited by Hu Ligui based on a talk given in Danshui, New Taipei City, on December 25, 2015, and a sharing session given at the Sheng Yen Education Foundation in March, 2016)*



# True Model of a Natural Chan Practitioner

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Ding Min

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*He approached glorifying experiences with a natural touch, and wrote about tormenting pains in great detail.*

*These specific stories allow us to see how he simply bravely faced the reality in life as a real Chan practitioner.*

*His model indeed greatly encourages and inspires us on our path of spiritual practice.*



## **Introducing the Speaker**

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### **Ding Min**

Ding Min attended her first seven-day Chan retreat at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in 1980, where she met Master Sheng Yen, laying a solid foundation for her faith in Buddhist practice. She was a professor at the Department of Chinese Literature of National Chengchi University, and specialized in Buddhist literature. By researching Master Sheng Yen's Travel Autobiography Series and exploring how he had lived his life, she saw the Master's unique style of religious journey and his effort to turn a new page for the propagation of Chinese Buddhism. Especially, she was most touched by how a sincere practitioner of Chan illustrated his genuine character in his life.

I majored in Chinese Literature in college, and was once the leader of the research and study team of the Society of Confucian and Mencius Thought at National Chengchi University. I considered myself to be a typical Confucian. When I was a postgraduate student, I lived in the student dormitory, so every day in the morning I got to hear the 108 bell ringing from the Zhinan Temple—when I was ready for bed, actually. One day, oddly, when I was listening to the bell ringing, the question of “where did I come from, and where am I going to go?” suddenly hit me. So I began to come into contact with Buddhism, trying to find the possible answers to my questions. But still, I was always arrogantly trying to use the Confucian perspective to challenge Buddhist teachings.

## A new-born calf knows no fear from a tiger

My first encounter with Master Sheng Yen was when I was a post-graduate student. At that time many students at Chengchi University’s Oriental Culture Society had attended meditation retreats held by the Master. These included Li Guangtai and Hong Qisong. Thinking back, I

can't even remember how exactly I got to know about the news of the Master's meditation retreats, and how to sign up. Unlike my school mates who had already had a deep understanding of Buddhism, I wasn't even clear what a seven-day Chan retreat was all about. As a Chinese saying goes, "a new-born calf knows no fear from a tiger." So I went and attended the retreat just like that. If I had known in advance that it would involve a lot of hard work, I don't think I would have had the courage to go for it. I am so grateful to have had such a special opportunity.

According to the *Chronicles of Master Sheng Yen* compiled and edited by Prof. Lin Qixian, the Master held his first and second seven-day Chan retreats at Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Culture in 1978. The attendees included members from the Cultural Institute and the then Institute for the Translation of Chinese Tripitaka. It is also recorded that in March 1980 Master Sheng Yen gave a lecture at the University at invitation of Chengchi University's Oriental Culture Society. At that time I was in my second year of graduate school for Chinese Literature. I guess that's how I knew about the retreat, so I attended a

retreat in the summer on 1980.

The seven-day Chan retreat was first held at the Institute of Buddhist Culture just after the Master had returned to Taiwan from the United States. He was strict all the way through the retreat, and there were many rigorous rules in the Chan Hall. I remember we had to be in the hall early in the morning. Even when one was only one minute late, one had to kneel outside of hall and was not allowed in. And the Master said that participants had to embrace the determination to “die in the Chan hall if unable to become enlightened.” For the first half of the retreat, I was struggling with leg cramps during each and every incense session, secretly moving my legs while knowing that this was not allowed. But sometimes I simply couldn’t bear it and so had to raise my hand to request for an incense-board strike, in order to eliminate my karmic obstacle. The daily practice finished at nine or 10 p.m., and afterwards I would rush to the hot spring at the bathroom to sooth my aching legs. On next day morning, the Master would always ask, “Those who continued to stay in the Chan hall and practice yesterday evening, please raise your hand.” I

then said to myself: “Gosh! Isn’t practicing from four o’clock in the morning until 10 p.m. long enough?” But I saw some raising their hands, while I just lowered my head and didn’t dare look at the Master.

The Master gave Dharma talks every day, which could always inspire our minds of deep repentance. I often shed tears, though I still experienced the same leg cramps. The Master also asked us to investigate gong’an, and would hold an incense board, remind us of the gong’an we were investigating, and then suddenly stop in front of somebody, shouting, “Say it!” If someone then answered through intellectual thinking, they would immediately receive an incense-board strike on the shoulder. And like a “bucket of black lacquer,” I always lowered my head, worrying that I would be “singled out” by the Master. I didn’t realise until later that the Master wouldn’t have even wasted his incense-board strike on a person like me, who was clueless. What impressed me the most is when he challenged us by asking, “Why did the woman selling water at the shore of the river die of thirst?” I remember a practitioner answering, “The fish was flying in the air.”

While the other replied, “Shifu, I think you look like an egg.” To my surprise, the Master commented, “I quite like this egg.” These two practitioners actually gave the “correct” answers approved by the Master so they were spared the strike. I remember this “gong’an” very well and would keep investigating it from time to time, and I didn’t really quite figure it out until a chance that came up a few years ago, all of a sudden, just like that.

## My first taste of Chan practice

During the retreat, the Master taught us to adjust our mind by starting with counting our breathing. In one sitting session, I suddenly felt that the heaven, earth, and I myself were all disappearing, and I felt completely joyful. But as soon as this thought emerged, I immediately returned to my original state. At the individual interview, the Maser instructed me to keep focusing on the breathing, and from then on I no longer felt my aching legs that much. The Master also taught us to practice the Guanyin method, and the key point was that one should simply let the sounds flow by without differentiating and grasping

them. For those few days, as I remember, there was an open-air Gezi Opera performance at the Rehai Hotel near the Institute of Buddhist Culture, from the morning till the evening, with loud gong and drum music. But by using the Guanyin method taught by the Master, I concentrated on my breathing, and the external sound of singing, as well as gong and drum music, all seemed to have been stopped by an invisible membrane. Though the sounds still existed, they sounded very distant, with a mind at peace undisturbed by those sounds. Participants were required to practice silence as well during the retreat. It's only after returning to normal daily life that I suddenly realized the beauty and ease of remaining silent, and that how we began to become attached to our daily activities, compared to our previous experience of letting go during those seven days of being aware and reflective.

After the retreat was concluded, I stayed at the temple for a few more days. For meals our dishes only included soybean pancake and some vegetables, allowing me to have a taste of what eating rough food was like. At that time I had thought of becoming a monk, but eventually I still

returned to “mundane” life. But one retreat mate who had sat next to me was an English major at Soochow University at that time, and she later chose to become a Buddhist nun, with a Dharma name “Guo Xiang.” The *Chronicles of Master Sheng Yen* says, “On September 8, the birthday of Ksitiagarbha Bodhisattva, an ordination ceremony was held at the Institute of Buddhist Culture, where four youths became monastics, given the Dharma names Guo Xiang,...marking the beginning of the Master establishing his own sangha.” Then I realized that Ven. Guo Xiang was one of the four monastics to become the first disciples of the Master. Once my retreat mate, and now she is an accomplished Buddhist monistic. I am really happy for her.

This seven-day retreat consolidated my conviction for Buddhist truth for life, and enabled me to realize that the Dharma is more than something for our intellectual comprehension and analysis, but represents the reality and truth as personally realized by the Buddha himself in his dhyana concentration and contemplation. In addition, I discovered that the nasal allergies that I had long suffered from suddenly disappeared, and I no longer needed to

carry a big pack of tissues with me all the time for my running nose. The transformation in my body and mind had greatly inspired me, given the fact that I was originally just a “bucket of black lacquer.”

Afterwards, due to busy schedules for my daily activities, I couldn't find the time to follow the Master to do any seven-day retreat, which I now find a great shame thinking back. In 1990, I obtained my PhD degree, and my dissertation, entitled “The Research of Buddhist Parable Literature,” won the Scholarship for Doctoral Dissertation issued by Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies. After some modifications and changes, it was published by Dharma Drum Publications in 1996. From then on, my relationship with Dharma Drum Mountain has mostly been one of language and words. I remember Ven. Guo Xian, then a lay Buddhist practitioner and now the director of DDM Cultural Center, and Gu Congyu, the then editor-in-chief of *Humanity Magazine*, used to have interviews with me at Chengchi University, and the three of us really enjoyed talking about Buddhism, forming an affinity that has lasted to this day.

In September of 1998, I followed Master Sheng Yen to a seminar entitled “Buddhism and Eastern Culture: In commemoration of the spread of Buddhism to China for 2000 years.” The next day the Master had to fly back to Taiwan to preside over the opening ceremony of a tour money-raising auction of contemporary artifacts and jewelry for Dharma Drum Mountain, while many of our team members continued to stay in China. Led by Li Zhifu, director of the Institute at that time, we went to visit the Great Wall at Jinshanling and the Waiba Temple in Chengde. I remember that day when we walked up the imposing and impressive Great Wall, but back in the hotel we were all exhausted. So we went to bed early. I stayed in a single room, and I woke up at three o’clock in the morning but felt refreshed. So I started to do meditation in bed and went back to sleep at four o’clock. As soon as I lay down and closed my eyes, I dreamed of a group of many men and women, young and old, surrounding my bed, making a lot of noise and trying to pull and grab me. Much as I tried hard to resist, I simply couldn’t speak at all. After pulling back and forth trying to resist, I was finally able to shout out “Namo Amitufo (Amitabha Buddha)” and then

the whole illusion disappeared. This experience further strengthened my faith in Amitabha Buddha.

## Inspired by the Master's writing and research

I didn't actually have many opportunities to stay at the Master's side to participate in relevant affairs. Nevertheless, in my academic research, I read many of the Master's works, and presented two papers on the Master, allowing me to have a deep understanding of his spirit and insight throughout his life.

In 1995, I presented a paper entitled "The Operational Model of Master Sheng Yen's Buddhist Undertaking," which was later included in the *Collection of Buddhist Research Papers: Modernization of Buddhism*, published by Buddha's Light Publishing. I discovered that all along the way the Master had always possessed a far-reaching foresight, as a pioneer in inspiring social atmosphere. After spending six years doing a solitary retreat in Meinong, Kaohsiung—in a time when the Buddhist circles in Taiwan still lacked

the awareness of the importance of academic knowledge—he already had the vision of studying in Japan and later obtaining his doctoral degree, becoming a scholar Chan master, setting an example for many Buddhist monastics in modern times, which was significant in uplifting the social image of Buddhist monks in Taiwan’s society.

The period when the Master started leading the sangha of Nung Chan Monastery reflected a time when Buddhism in Taiwan still had a strong mundane character. In the April 1987 issue of *Living Psychology Magazine*, there was an article on monastics at Nung Chan Monastery. Its description on the monastic life at Nung Chan Monastery was summarized as “morning chanting session, sitting meditation, work practice, self-study, and prostrating to the Buddha constitute the entirety of their life,” and that “finding their true inner self in a simple and plain life.” This shows that in early days the Monastery’s sangha tended to focus on the tradition of personal inner cultivation for a supramundane purpose. However, considering the interrelationships between Buddhism and modern times, the Master transformed the supramundane-

oriented sangha at Nung Chan Monastery into a Dharma Drum sangha with the aim to build a pure land on earth. The Master's lifelong endeavor was in Buddhist education. As a great educator seeking to realize Buddhism in the world, he embodied academic study and Chan practice. This marks his pioneering feature in reinventing Buddhism in its contemporary context. Dharma Drum Mountain as an education center for both academic study and actual practice can be said to represent the unique appeal among the many Buddhist temples and monasteries in Taiwan.

## Personal journeys as a pilgrimage map

To celebrate the Master's 70th birthday in 2002, I presented a paper entitled the "Travel Diaries of Buddhist Monks among Contemporary Travel Literature in Taiwan: Exploring Master Sheng Yen's Travel Autobiography Series." The Master Sheng Yen's Travel Autobiography Series started in 1980 and concluded in 2001, with a total of 12 books, including *The Return* (published in 1967), *Spring of Dharma and Source of Life*, *Pilgrimage to the Land of the Buddha*, *A Mine in Golden Mountain*, *A Cool Wind in the House of Fire*,

*The Four Directions, Four Seasons, Passing Clouds and Trickling Streams, A Lotus Flower at Every Step, Flower in Sky and Moon in Water, Travelogues Year 2000, and Ascending the Summit.* These 12 books are both autobiographies and travelogues, which reveal the Master's insight, thought, and practice during different stages of his life.

By following his footprints, we can discover that his “pilgrimage in search of the spiritual root” started with his trip back to his homeland as recorded in the book, *Spring of Dharma and Source of Life*. August 1987 marked the first opening up of family visits across the Taiwan Strait. Master Sheng Yen, who had been separated from his family in China for over 30 years at that time, made his first trip back in his hometown in spring of 1988. At that time he was already 59 years old. He later made another two trips back his hometown in 1996, one in spring and one in summer, to meet his family and friends. The book features his feelings and memories about history, as well as his thoughts about his wandering life, returning home in honor, and giving back to his home community.

After the first trip back in his hometown, the Master led a group of people on a trip to India and Nepal to visit the Buddhist sites, including where the Buddha was born, preached the Dharma, attained the Path, and entered nirvana. There were three more trips, when he led another group of people to visit ancient temples in China to investigate their construction. The Master routes of travel covered the whole of China, even including the plateaus beyond the Great Wall. He paid extensive visits to all of the major mountains and prominent temples significant for Chinese Buddhist history.

These mountains and temples include the following:

a. the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains: Mt Putuo, Mt Jiuhua, Mt Emei, and Mt Wutai.

b. the Jiangnan Area

Jiangsu: Lingyin Temple, Jingci Temple, and Fenglin Temple in Hangzhou; Hanshan Temple and Lingyanshan Temple in Suzhou; Mt Baohua and Mt Qixia in Nanjing; Jinshan Temple, Zhenjiang; Dinghui Temple, Jiaoshan; Guangjiao Temple, Nantong, Jingan

Temple, Longhua Temple, and Yufu Temple  
in Shanghai.

Zhejiang: Mt Shicheng and Dafo Temple in Xinchang;  
Guoqing Temple on Mt Tiantai; Xuedou  
Temple, Tiantong Temple, and Ayuwang  
Temple in Ningbo.

c. the South-west Area:

Yunnan: Mt Jizu, the field of activity of Master Xu  
Yun; Yuantong Temple, Kunming; and  
Chongsheng Temple, Dali.

Sichuan: Wenshu Yuan Monastery, Chengdu.

Tibet: Zhebang (Drepung) Temple, Sera Monastery,  
Potala Palace, and Jokhang Monastery in  
Lhasa.

d. the North-west Area:

Gansu: Mogao Caves, Dunhuang; Maijishan  
Grottoes, Tianshui; Labrang Monastery.

Shanxi: Yungang Grottoes, Datong; Chongshan  
Temple, Taiyuan.

Henan: Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang; White Horse  
Temple; Shaolin Temple.

Hebei: Tanzhe Temple, Jietan Temple, White Cloud

Temple, Yunju Temple, Mt Shijing, in Beijing.  
Shaanxi: Xian's Daxingshan Temple, Xingjiao Temple,  
Giant Wild Goose Pagoda in Ci'en Temple,  
Qinglong Temple, Famen Temple, Small  
Wild Goose Pagoda at Dajianfu Temple.

The reason why I'm listing all the famous mountains and Buddhist sites the Master visited is that this represents a pilgrimage map in and of itself. From these years of traveling experiences, the Master's Travel Autobiography Series are absolutely the best travel guides one can find. Whether for a pilgrimage trip to India, or a visit to the famous mountains and Buddhist temples in China, the Master would use a rich amount of Buddhist history and stories to introduce the development of the relevant Buddhist sacred sites, ancient temples, prominent monks in history, cherished artifacts collection, and legends of spiritual response, connecting the dialogues across the dimension of time among these sacred Buddhist places, enabling the religious scenarios, activities, and atmospheres throughout history to interact with each other.

Take the Xiantong Temple in Mt Wutai as mentioned in *A Cool Wind in the House of Fire*, there is a building dedicated to Buddhist treasures, where there is a most valuable artwork entitled “Character Pagoda of Avatamsaka Sutra,” a *Diamond Sutra* transcribed in blood, and the *Yongle North Tripitaka*. The Master commented how this pagoda had hardly been mentioned in travel guides, and was known to few tourists. It is seldom opened to the public. Indeed, according to my own two visits to Xiantong Temple this year, the local tour guide didn’t mention this thing at all, and I regretted that I was in such a hurry because I was traveling with a tour group and so couldn’t arrange any special visits. Besides, the Master also described the cultural scenes at those sacred mountains and prominent temples, and their religious atmosphere, as well as the local sanghas, leaving a record of what his pilgrimage was like at that time. This served as a reference material for our later visits to the same places, and enabled us to know more about how Buddhism had developed and transformed itself in China. They are certainly an extremely valuable first-hand record of history.

## Sharing the Dharma in the west to speak for Chinese Buddhism

In the Travel Autobiography Series, the Master used the travelogue genre to describe in detail how he travelled to different countries in the west to guide seven-day Chan retreats and give Dharma lectures. These stories allow us a glimpse of how the Master approached western societies in a steadfast manner as a Chan teacher, spreading Chan teaching and helping it take root in the west. The establishment of Dharma Drum Retreat Center in upper state New York and the Silent Illumination Chan retreats taking place there represent a milestone for the Master's effort to share the Dharma in the global Buddhist community, signifying Chinese Buddhism gaining more access and say in western society.

The diaries of Master's travels in the west indeed open our eyes and broaden our vision. For example, in *Travelogues Year 2000*, he wrote about his visit of St. Petersburg in Russia, where he often saw piles of watermelons, apples, pears sold on the street corners.

There were huge green peppers, red peppers, yellow peppers, and tomatoes, indicating a rich agricultural economy. In Taiwan they had heard that the place they were going to visit had scarce resources and so they had brought along with them a lot of canned food and dry foodstuffs in advance, which proved to be unnecessary. For another example, in *The Four Direction*, he mentioned that when he went to a farm in Wales to conduct a seven-day Chan retreat, he was surprised by the fact that afternoon tea was part of the daily schedule, because British people value their afternoon tea. Participants even started commenting about the snacks. The Master said humorously that it was the first time there was tea time in his Chan retreat. Although he didn't quite approve of the idea, he tacitly accepted it anyway. When he visited the British Museum to see the Dunhuang scrolls, Ven. Guo Yuan, who accompanied him on the journey, happened to find a Tang-dynasty Buddhist on the scroll whose name is identical to the Master's, which is "Sheng Yen." Even more coincidentally was that his family name was also Chang. That was indeed a very interesting experience.

Some of Buddhist monasteries the Master visited in Europe were previously abbeys. For example, the Gaia House, a meditation retreat center in Devon, UK, where he conducted a seven-day Chan retreat, was originally a catholic abbey. And, thanks to the Master's trip, we got to know that there was actually a Buddhist college called the Sharpham College, in the south of England. This college had buildings built in Renaissance style. Rabindranath Tagore, the famous Indian poet, had once stayed here when he visited the UK. In addition, there is a Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey in Hexham, in Northern England. Located in a remote moorland area of Northumberland, about 2900 feet high, it is an international Buddhist monastic community, part of a larger organization called "Order of Buddhist Contemplatives." The monks there led a strictly disciplined life and followed austere practices, worthy of our admiration.

Through the Master's writings, we learned about interesting things regarding the differences between Buddhist monks in the west and in the east. For example,

Buddhist monks from Iceland consider eating fish to be “vegetarian.” And, the Zen Mountain Monastery in New York City consider themselves to be monastic practitioners, but actually dress in lay people’s clothing except for when they need to enter the Chan hall. When Americans become monastic practitioners, it is difficult for them to remain as monastics all their life, so some of the Master’s western monastic disciples have actually returned to the lay life.

All in all, his travel diaries are rich in content with a variety of stories. The Master wrote about scenery and described people using different literary touches, either in detail or summary, general or refined, deep and shallow, fast and slow, light or heavy. Sometimes he went into those tiny little things, and sometimes he would give detailed descriptions about the features, and sometimes he would simply give a sketch about something. Generally speaking, the Master’s eloquent writing allowed us to experience the places as if we were there personally, for a unique religious journey.

## The Master as a model of Chan practitioner

The Travel Autobiography Series reveals Master Sheng Yen as a public figure as well as his open-mindedness throughout his life. He approached glorifying experiences with a natural touch, and wrote about tormenting pains in great detail, including descriptions of the times when he was feeling worried and experiencing hardships. These specific stories allow us to get to know him as a natural and real Chan practitioner who also had to live through trials and tribulations in life. This includes his final years when he had to receive kidney dialysis, during which he simply bravely faced the reality in life as it is. His model indeed greatly encourages and inspires us on our path of spiritual practice.

The Travel Autobiography Series also detailed the Master's life. He was born into a poor farmer family in Jiangsu Province, China. He became a novice at a monastery in Langshan, but had to spend most of his monastic life learning and performing funeral ceremonies in Shanghai. At 20, he came to Taiwan with the Nationalist

Army. At 30, he resumed his monastic life by ordaining under Master Dong Chu. At 34, he began his six-year solitary retreat in Meinong, Kaohsiung. At 40, he went to Japan for further study and obtained his PhD at age 46. At 47, for a period of time he even had to bring dumped furniture on the New York streets back to the Chan Meditation Center he had just started to use them. At 60, he established Dharma Drum Mountain, which became one of the most important Buddhist organizations in Taiwan. At 68, he founded the Dharma Drum Retreat Center in upper state New York, marking a significant result for his effort to share Chan Buddhism in the US for the previous 20 years. At 70, he consecutively held seven 7-day Silent Illumination retreats, signifying his historic status as a Chan teacher in the “Sheng Yen style.” At 71, when it was 2000, he was invited to attend the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders held at the UN, and finally became a world-renown religious teacher.

I remember one night after my paper—“Travel Diaries of Buddhist Monks among Contemporary Travel

Literature in Taiwan: Exploring Master Sheng Yen's Travel Autobiography Series"—was presented, I got a phone call from the Master. The Master said that he had read my paper, and he encouraged me by affirming the arguments I presented in the paper. He also invited me to bring my family to come up to Dharma Drum Mountain for a visit. I was so moved when hanging up the phone. There were so many matters the Master had to take care of, and yet he still took the time to encourage me. This unexpected encouragement was indeed most heartwarming.

## The diversified Dharma Drum Lecture Series in Humanities

The *Chronicles of Master Sheng Yen* stated that at lunch time of October 19, 2008, the president of National Chengchi University, Prof. Wu Sihua, Dean of Academic Affairs, Cai Liankang, and Director of the College of Liberal Arts, Wang Wenyan, expressed to the Master his wish to set up the Dharma Drum Lecture Series in Humanities at Chengchi University, hoping to promote the Six Ethics of the Mind movement on the university's

campus. And the Master agreed. So, in the fall of 2009, the university's president set up the Dharma Drum Lecture Series in Humanities, and the president asked me to host this lecture series and urged me to run the program with good care. The courses of the lecture series take place at the Shun-wen Lecture Room, one of the best class spaces at the university. I took in over 130 students, and there were still many others on the waiting list.

That semester, I invited Prof. Wei Tiancong, an honorary professor at the Department of Chinese Literature, who could be said to embody the contemporary Chinese literature history himself, and Prof. Jiang Shuzhuo, vice-president of the Jinan University in Guangdong, who was renowned for his research in contemporary literature aesthetics, to give a lecture on “New Trends and Values of Humanistic Thinking under the Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” to broaden the student's vision, given their different perspectives. I also invited Prof. Li Jiawei, distinguished professor at National Tsinghua University and CEO of the Dr. Cecilia Koo Botanic Conservation Center, to give a talk on “Dialogue between Humans and

Nature.” It was an extraordinary lecture, which not only broadened the university’s students’ scientific vision, but also aroused their sense of mission to protect the planet.

I also invited Prof. Fan Libin, an outstanding Guqin player and singer who taught at Tainan National University of the Arts, to give a lecture on “Guqin playing and singing: a dialogue between Guqin music and spirituality.” A famous author and painter, Xi Song, gave a lecture on “In Search for a Bodhi Tree: the Image of a Bodhisattva at Ease.” Liang Hanyi, a female writer and also a veteran Chan practitioner, gave a lecture on “Summer Retreat Life: Do you also need another kind of Summer of Relief?” Su Xiuhui, an expert in Buddhist practice and Tea ceremony, on the other hand, showed the students about tea brewing and tea tasting, in which they could learn about Chan in tea. These four speakers, respectively achieved in music, painting and calligraphy, literary creation, and tea ceremony, were also veteran Buddhist practitioners. They inspired the students with their experience and realization of the Dharma and how it could transform their life.

Besides, I invited Mr. Wang Rong, leader of the Dharma Drum Humanities and Social Improvement Foundation Seed-Teachers Class, to give a speech on “Spiritual Image of the Six Ethics of the Mind and Ethical Relationships.” I invited Chang Guang-dou, a famous TV producer in Taiwan, to speak on “One Single Alms Bowl, the Food of a Thousand Households: Master Sheng Yen’s Journey of Chan of Ten Thousand Miles.” Both speeches helped the students gain an understanding of the Master’s ideals and personal practice. In addition, I led the whole group of students on a one-day trip to Dharma Drum Mountain. During the whole semester, both the students and I had gained and learned a lot. Thanks to Master Sheng Yen and National Chengchi University president Wu Sihwa, for those cherished memories in my teaching career.

## Emulating Guanyin Bodhisattva to engage in Buddhist undertakings

According to the Chronicles, on October 11, 2008, Luo Zong-tao, a lecture professor at Hsuan Chuang University, and his wife; Chen Qi-xi, director of the Master’s Degree in

Life Education at National Taipei University of Education, and his wife; Tu Yan-qiu, a professor of the Department of Language and Creative Writing at National Taipei University of Education, and his student Lin Tai-shi; as well as me and my husband, were invited to meet with the Master. In our conversation, the Master mentioned and explained about the valuable features in Chinese Buddhism and the structure of his thinking. He also urged us to put in effort to enhance and promote Chinese Buddhism. The Master treated us to an unforgettable lunch, which was simple yet most delicious. I didn't expect that it would be the last lunch I had with the Master. The Master, while in his frail physical health, managed to undertake such a heavy bodhisattva deed. What he had achieved during his 80 years of life had actually had a far-reaching effect beyond the worldly time of 80 years.

It is a tremendous blessing for me to have met the Master in my lifetime. Before meeting the Master, my life had been limited to following the rhythm of secular values, limited to self-indulgent emotions, and confined in the castle of my own sentimental convictions. With

the experiences of doing seven-day Chan retreats led by the Master, I sampled the taste of calm and coolness brought forth by the Dharma, and caught a glimpse of the dimension of life's infinite vastness. It was then that I decided to set up a small Buddha shrine in my house, and Buddhist practice became the most precious provision for my spiritual life. The Master inspired and helped me initiate my Dharma-life, and I will always feel grateful for his favor in this regard.

I remember the day when the Master passed away. I got a phone call from Dharma sister Gu Congyu, who informed me of the news. I felt so sad, and so utterly bereft. What immediately emerged in my mind was the Master's habitual gentle voice and smile, uttering the words: "The universe may one day perish, yet my vows are eternal. 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 pray for everyone to join forces to promote." Indeed, only a great bodhisattva can make such an extraordinary vow. I believe that the Master hasn't really left; somewhere in the vast space of the

universe, he is still accompanying and guarding us, and will return to the world again to fulfill his vow.

## Keep the Positive Conditions Going without Cessation

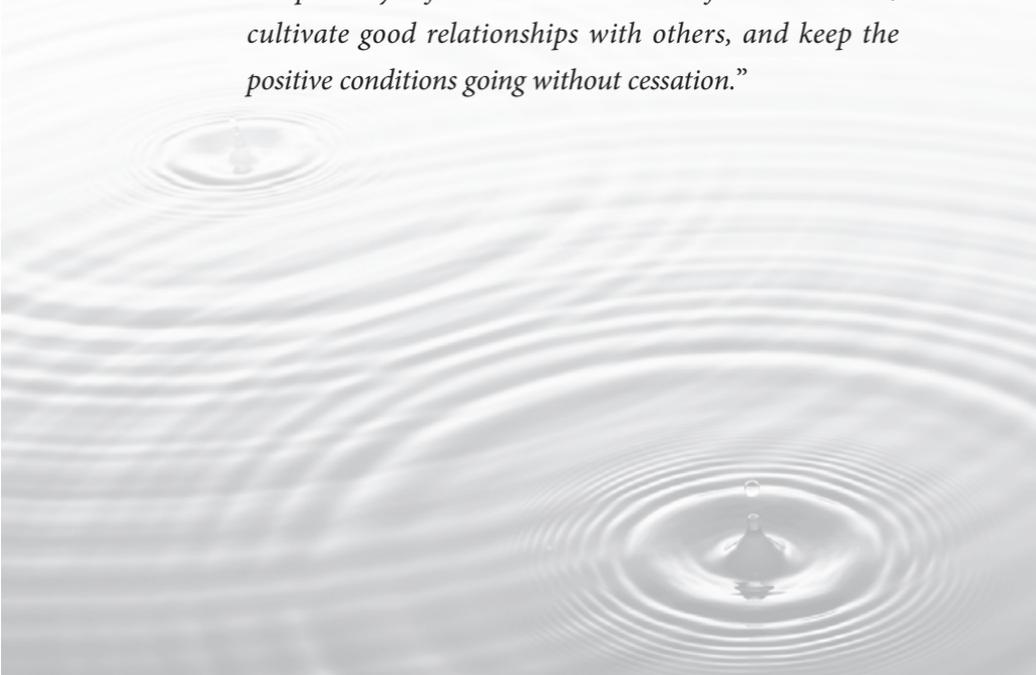
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Shan Te-hsing

*Form the Master's teaching and example I've deeply felt his effort to perfectly combine worldly dharmas and supramundane Dharma, to take care of both human relationships and Buddhist truth.*

*For the past few years I've been following the Master's teaching to adapt to the conditions as they arise and form positive relationships with others through academic studies and Buddhist teachings in daily life.*

*I expect myself to "make the most of the resources, cultivate good relationships with others, and keep the positive conditions going without cessation."*



## Introducing the Speaker

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### Shan Te-hsing

Born in 1955 in Nantou, In 1992, he participated in the first Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals organized by Dharma Drum Mountain, where he was inspired by the Master's teaching and example, which prompted him to start translating the Master's English works, including *Zen Wisdom*, *The Method of No-method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*, and *Shattering the Great Doubt*. Master Sheng Yen praised his translation by saying, "He is good at both English and Chinese. His translation can best grasp the meaning of the original text, speak to Chinese readers, and faithfully reflect the interpretation of Chan literature." Currently a Distinguished Researcher at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, he specializes in literature and cultural research.

According to my family tree, my ancestors had long lived in Shandong, China. After many generations of hard work, our family gradually prospered and was keen to perform good deeds. We even had our own family temple, and made offerings to a Buddhist monk our family was close to. When my great grandfather died, he had a rosary made of Black Bodhi Seeds. My father often mentioned this, but I couldn't understand its significance at that time. It was only many years after I started to learn Buddhism that I had realized that maybe our ancestors had long been helping me by sowing the seeds in me to learn about Buddhism, because my late mother once told me that I was actually born into an environment that was not friendly to learning Buddhism. Nonetheless, it made me become interested in becoming a Buddhist.

## Born in Nantou, Ignorant of Buddhism

My parents were refugee students from Shandong. They were married in their home town. Due to the turmoil at the time, my family suffered a downturn. In 1949, we followed our school to relocate all the way to the south

of China, and in July 1949 we boarded a landing boat in Guangdong and traveled eastbound, landing in Penghu on July 7. One week later, my father was forced to join the army at gunpoint, during the July 13 Incident. According to the account of Wang Dingjun, a lay friend of Master Sheng Yen, the Nationalist Government was able to settle in Taiwan thanks to two major bloody incidents: one being the February 28 Incident, which cast a shadow on many local Taiwanese, and the other being the Penghu 713 Incident, which, conversely, suppressed many refugee immigrants from China. On the other hand, female students and younger male students were able to stay at the Secondary School for Penghu Defence Command Soldiers' Children. My mother graduated in 1951, and later came to Taiwan. She first taught at Fenglin Elementary School in Kaohsiung, and after three years she was transferred to Zhongliao Elementary School in Nantou County. I was born in 1955, in Yongping Village, Zhongliao, Nantou. Being born and raised in Nantou, I've always been proud of the fact that I came from a humble countryside family. Nantou is the only landlocked county in Taiwan, and Zhongliao Village is even more remote. It wasn't really known to many

people in Taiwan until the 911 Earthquake in 1999.

When I was little, I went to the only kindergarten run by a local Presbyterian Church. On Sunday I went to the Church's Sunday school, up until the day I started to attend a cram school to prepare for the secondary school entrance examination. So I gained some understanding of Christianity, but was never baptized. In the countryside, there were many folk religions and different kinds of temples and shrines, mainly for burning incense, praying for fortune, asking for deity instructions, praying for blessings, and drawing divine lots. In my senior years at elementary school, I witnessed the once-every-60-years Jiao Offering ritual, which I can still remember vividly. When my classmates mentioned the mediums, they would even mimic how they became possessed by the spirits in our classroom, shaking their bodies, shouting and yelling, attracting much attention. These folk beliefs were considered nothing but old-fashion superstition in the eyes of the teachers, who would avoid them as possible as they could. So, growing up in such an environment, I didn't have any opportunities to come in contact with Buddhism in its correct sense.

## The Master's book connected me to the Dharma for the first time

After six years of hard study, I passed the college entrance examination and entered the Department of English at National Chengchi University. So I moved away from my hometown where I had lived for 17 years and settled at the foot of Mountain Zhinan. The famous Taoist Zhinan Temple is situated on the mountain. We would sometimes visit the temple walking up the steps from the back of our campus and enjoy a free lunch. But the temple, apart from its vast area, grandeur architecture, and many visitors to pray for fortunes, didn't really change my impressions about folk religions. Within college students, the keenest to propagate their faith were Christians. There were many activities organized or offered by Christian congregations near our campus, such as Sunday worship and Bible study classes. Christian students were also very enthusiastic in sharing their faith, drawing many college students who were interested in knowing more about western cultures and spiritual exploration, or even learning English. In contrast, my impression was that there weren't

any outlets of Buddhist organizations nearby offering activities or events. Due to the government's worry about spreading religion in campus, the one-and-only Buddhist society had to name itself as the Oriental Culture Society, making it less appealing to people like me, who studied English literature, or the other students. The influences of the two religions were obvious, which explained the fact that among my classmates in college, those who are religious are mostly Christians, and there are only two or three among us who are Buddhists.

However, naturally the turning points seemed to be there. I loved visiting bookstores, and I came across a few books on Zen in nearby bookstores. Almost all of them were translated from English, and published by, for example, the Zhiwen Publisher, in their New Tide Series. What was most impressing were books authored by D. T. Suzuki. It was then that I started to come in contact with Buddhist books, which were mostly about Chinese Chan Buddhism. This was a bit like export-to-import. I was fascinated by those books about Zen, mainly because of the strange and sometimes shocking actions and

remarks by ancient Chan Masters, as well as those deep, profound, and sometimes difficult “gong’an,” or stories. Probably it’s because college students would find those anti-authoritarian, anti-conventional, and anti-popular behaviors very appealing, and we would see humorous and funny words of spiritual depth most interesting and worth exploring. So the more challenging they were to comprehend, the more intriguing they became.

At that time I had heard others speak of Master Sheng Yen as a famous figure, though I knew little about him. During the time I was a postgraduate student, Li Pei-guang, a fellow student who came a few years later than I, went to Nung Chan Monastery to learn Buddhism and meditation practice with Master Sheng Yen. He gave me a book authored by the Master, entitled “Necklace.” It was a paperback without a fancy cover, yet with truthful and calming content that arouses in one the feeling that “the writing mirrors the writer, and the book reflects the author.” It was then that I started connecting to the Master for the first time. But it was limited to reading his book, and I hadn’t really thought about starting to learn Buddhism. And

then another 10 years passed, though during this period I continued to read some Buddhist books, which gave me spiritual food for thought while at graduate school. However, it was during the 20 months during which I was doing my military service that I found myself reading a lot of Buddhist books. They not only gave me the calming power, but also helped me lay the foundation for my faith.

## Compulsory military service served as a contributory condition

In October 1986, as a prospective officer, I was drafted into the Infantry School in Fengshan, Kaohsiung for the fundamental training as a Platoon Commander. Three months before that I just got my PhD degree in comparative literature, and had served at Academia Sinica as assistant researcher for three years. A far cry from a most advanced academic research institute, the military base was a place where one was supposed to follow every order. With extremely short hair and having to withstand the scorching weather in southern Taiwan, I was now a sergeant to start with. What a huge difference! I was

the oldest among my group of trainees: a whole 10 years older than polytechnic graduates and senior in age to our Squadron commander. As Hao Bocun, the then Chief of the General Staff, required, we had to receive strict physical training and monotonous political propaganda education. We had to run for 5,000 meters every morning, practice mock assault as a band, platoon, and company, carry our rifles to take over the 714 Height, and recite the General Principle of Teaching Fighting Skills. On top of that I hurt my ankle performing a vault—one can imagine how I struggled at that time. I came from a happy and harmonious family and had always been successful in my studies, and yet my military service represented the most stressful time of my life. I hadn't had my fortune told before, but once I did try looking for advice by a powerful and highly skilled fortune teller. It turned out that I was in the middle of the so-called "void and loss fate." It was the first time I had heard of that "technical term." For example, during my training period when I only had single days off, that meant I wouldn't have enough time to go back to Nantou to see my parents or to Taipei to see my wife. I could only go to downtown Kaohsiung to spend the day,

and visit bookstores, and read some Buddhist books. At most I would have time to visit Fo Guang Shan, and I also visited the Fengshan Buddhist Lotus Society. It was later that I realized that the abbots of the two places I visited, Ven. Xing Yun and Ven. Zhu Yun, actually had a deep Dharma connection with Master Sheng Yen.

After finishing the four-and-half months recruit training, I was assigned to the Chung Cheng Armed Forces Preparatory School in Fengshan as a team duty officer, to spend time with a group of students. Compared to the training period, I could now enjoy more private time to my own. And sharing a dormitory with another platoon commander meant that I could have my own space and bookshelves. Because we took turns performing our duties, I had a day off once every two weeks, and for the rest of time we were not allowed to step out of the school. Feeling confined, I suddenly found what I had studied in literature was of little relevance, that it couldn't really help me deal with my troubling situations at that time, so I put away literature and started reading Buddhist books extensively.

What I had used to read about all kinds of suffering in books was nothing more about abstract description and explanation, but now what I was encountering was really the low-tide in my life. The “eight kinds of suffering”—apart from the suffering of “birth,” and “death”—including the suffering of aging, sickness, associating with persons and things that one dislikes, separation from what one likes, not to get what one wants, and the suffering of the five aggregates, had all become so relevant and part of my daily experience. My two bookshelves were full of the books I got from bookstores and Buddhist temples, including those by Ven. Guang Qin, Ven. Sheng Yen, Ven. Xing Yun, Ven. Cheng Yen, and Chen Chien Min, also known as Yogi Chen. I read them whenever I had time. Yogi Chen’s Qugongzhai Collection contains a rich content, allowing me to relate to the vast broadness of Buddhist teaching. Ven. Xing Yun’s lecture collection was easy to access, yet explained in a clear-cut way. Ven. Cheng Yen’s books were written in a refined and detailed manner. Ven. Guang Qin’s Dharma words were powerful in a simple and straightforward manner; especially, he said that “Only by doing a task with a willing devotion

can one grow in wisdom,” which I found most beneficial for me serving in the army. Among these Buddhist books what I found most in line with Buddhist doctrines and essentials and human relations were Master Sheng Yen’s books. Besides re-reading his books about Chan, I also read *Essentials of Buddhist Sila and Vinaya*, the kind of books that I would find it hard to read in detail outside military service time. In addition, as I always hated reciting things, when I thought of the fact that I had to recite the General Principle of Teaching Fighting Skills, I would rather spend the same time reciting Buddhist sutras. So I made an effort to recite the *Heart Sutra* and the *Sutra on the Eight Realizations of the Great Beings*, the two relatively short sutras. To this day, I still recite the Heart Sutra as part of daily practice in the morning. Many people consider compulsory military service to be a waste of their time, especially for young people who have just started their academic career. Nevertheless, thinking back on my 20-month military service time, I regard it as a rare opportunity, a contributing condition, which forced me to directly face the various kinds of suffering in human life, especially when I had always experienced smooth sailing

in life before. I got to experience in person why the truth of suffering is the first truth in the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism, and what comes after are the truths about causes of suffering, extinction of suffering, and the Path to eliminate nirvana.

## Entering the gate of Chan practice

My life in the military allowed me to temporarily leave the academic environment and thus gain access to many Buddhist books. I found Master Sheng Yen's works the most convincing, so I decided to take the Three Refuges. And, knowing that he wasn't really in good health, I didn't want to put it off any further, once I had the thought. So in August 1988, immediately after I was discharged from the military, I went back to Nantou to see my parents, and the next weekend I then travelled to Taipei alone, to take the Refuge at Nung Chan Monastery in Beitou, formally becoming a Buddhist, given the Dharma name "Guo Xi."

My life in the military service made me realize that knowledge learned from books was hardly practical

when one is facing difficulties in life, and my academic experiences allowed me to recognize all the more the features and limitations of intellectuals. Therefore, I became more aware of the differences between practicing Buddhism and studying Buddhist knowledge, and turned to focus more on how to apply Buddhist compassion and wisdom in daily life, helping self and others resolve afflictions, instead of merely accumulating knowledge and entertaining empty talks. However, because I was occupied with research and later I went abroad for further study, I had missed the opportunity to formally learn Buddhist practice with the Master, which I now find a big shame.

In early 1992, I learned the news about the Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals in *Humanity Magazine*. The three-day Chan retreat was going to be led by Master Sheng Yen personally. I was so happy to know that, but wasn't sure if I qualified as a "prominent" professional, so I made a phone call to Nung Chan Monastery to inquire. It was Dharma sister Zhao Maolin who picked up the phone. I explained why I was calling and she asked me what I did for a living. I said I was an

associate researcher at Academia Sinica, and she replied, “You’re absolutely qualified!” So I signed up, and joined the retreat taking place from February 9 to 12, with 39 other participants. As it was a trial retreat, it wasn’t referred to as the “First” retreat. Afterwards, because it was so well received, they decided to continue this type of retreat. In 2009, it was renamed the Self-Transcendence Chan Camp, which is now in its quarter-century of history, and has welcomed many people from Taiwan society who aspire to learn and practice Buddhism. I often like to think of myself as belonging to the first group of practitioners attending the “First” Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals, but as the Master always stressed: after a master has guided you inside the gate, what is important is your own practice and cultivation, rather than feeling proud of your “seniority” in terms of spiritual practice. Otherwise, you’re just growing old in age instead of growing more mature in wisdom, bringing shame on your Shifu, and on yourself as well in the end.

The retreat was held at the Guanyin Hall, the earliest building on Dharma Drum Mountain, which was

demolished long ago. The statue of Guanyin Bodhisattva enshrined in the hall is now the very statue standing at the top of Dharma Drum Mountain complex, as the “Founding Guanyin statue.” To us who were used to comfortable city life, this retreat was really a shocking re-education. On one hand, the long sitting session itself was torture in itself, having to endure numb legs and an aching waist. In addition, being required to participate in silence at all times made those university professors, elected representatives, and company officers, who make their living by “speaking and talking,” really uncomfortable. The three days of communal living seemed to throw me back to my student and military days. On the other hand, the Master was trying his utmost effort to make sure that we, who had chosen to fall into the snare ourselves and felt so proud of ourselves most of the time, could take home something useful. Besides guiding us in Chan practice and holding the incense board to check our state of sitting meditation, he especially gave us extra Dharma talks on Buddhist essentials and principles of meditative practice. In order to let us take the Buddhist teaching home, he gave us permission to take notes, which was normally not

allowed. All in all, apart from teaching and guiding us on the concepts and methods of Chan practice, he also took painstaking care of our daily schedule, making sure that we were comfortable with everything provided and therefore could fully devote ourselves to learning and practicing. We were indeed very moved by his effort to spread the Dharma. The three days of enlightening sessions really awakened our long-sleeping Buddha-nature. Many of us couldn't help shed tears during the morning and evening chanting sessions, as well as during the repentance prostration.

## Learning by translating, advancing in both study and practice

I was so inspired by this Chan retreat that I later participated in several other three-day retreats, as well as some seven-day retreats. Every time I experienced and learned something new. Because I was not very smart, and wasn't familiar with Buddhist technical terms, a lot of times I would make very stupid mistakes. After attending several times of seven-day retreats at Nung Chan Monastery, where

we were taken good care of by the Master and volunteers, I often thought to myself: what merits and virtues did I have, to deserve such nice treats at a Buddhist temple? Sometimes I really felt ashamed of myself. Once, after a retreat, I asked Ven. Guo Guang, the then secretary of the Master, if I could help translate his English books into Chinese, since I had received training in English literature and had translated some books. Not long afterwards, the venerable told the Master about this and he agreed. This was about how I started to translate the Master's works into Chinese. Starting from 1994, I have translated *Collection of Talks on Faith in Mind* (1997), and later translated on my own effort the *Zen Wisdom: Conversations of Buddhism* (2003), *Song of Mind: Wisdom from the Zen Classic Xin Ming* (2006), *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination* (2009), and *Shattering the Great Doubt: The Chan Practice of Huatou* (2011). In all 17 years, the stories of my translation of his books can be seen in the forewords and colophons in those books. Among them, I would say the process in translating *The Method of No-Method: The Chan Practice of Silent Illumination*, which was published after the Master's passing, was the most challenging. In the translator's note

for *Song of Mind: Wisdom from the Zen Classic Xin Ming*, I wrote about the principle of my translation by saying that “the order of priority is faithfulness, smoothness, and concision”. Now as I think back, I really feel that I was so fortunate to be able to combine my expertise of translation with ultimate care, by translating the Master’s Dharma talk given in the United States into Chinese. Not only did I have to understand the content through and through and grasp the essentials for myself, I also had to share it with a broader audience in the global Chinese speaking communities, for the benefit of self and others.

The Master’s teaching and example had a great influence on me. If there is one sentence to describe it, I would say “My parents have nurtured my body, but it was thanks to the Master who has nurtured my wisdom life.” From the Master’s teaching and example, especially from his personal talks and writings, I have deeply felt his effort to perfectly combine worldly dharmas and supramundane Dharma, to take care of both human relationships and Buddhist truth, and to share his own experiences and insights in plain and accessible language. The Master had

more than once said that the reason he was devoted to spreading the Dharma was that he had found out that the Dharma was so good but so few people really understood it, and so many people misunderstood it. In response to questions regarding his Complete Works of Master Sheng Yen, he talked about his principle of writing saying: “The purpose of my writings was never about what I had to say to the readers, but about what the readers need to know most urgently. I offer what I have learned and known with the readers’ perspectives in mind. So when I write, first I consider the readers’ interest and the possible effect on them. If my readers have finished reading my writing without really obtaining some beneficial and practical knowledge, then it would amount to wasting their time.”

The Master’s goal is to spread the Dharma for the benefit of sentient beings. To spread the Dharma, one needs to have wisdom; to benefit sentient beings, one needs to have compassion. Therefore, one should apply both wisdom and compassion. For that purpose he worked hard, practiced what he preached, and adjusted his teaching to meet the needs of different people. He valued

both study and practice, and was skillful in his means of instruction, all for the purpose of benefitting the self and others. In his 108 Adages of Wisdom, he also mentioned that “The value of life lies in giving. Through giving, we are able to grow ourselves and cultivate good relationships with others.” For the past few years I’ve been occupied with worldly affairs and therefore haven’t really spent much time on my Chan practice, failing to live up to what I have learned in Buddhism. But fortunately I’ve been in contact with Dharma Drum Mountain and followed the Master’s teaching of adapting to the conditions as they arise, and learned to form positive relationships with others through academic studies and Buddhist teachings in my daily life. Every day I expect myself to “make the most of the resources, cultivate good relationships with others, and keep the positive conditions going without cessation.

The Master often said that he was nothing but an ordinary person, and an ordinary monk. Nevertheless, it is precisely because he considered himself to be ordinary that he worked even harder and thereby achieved what made him extraordinary. He also urged people to learn from

others for their good points. The Master's teaching and example benefitted me a lot. These teachings can be found in his Chan practice guidance and Dharma talks. I was lucky enough to participate in one of them, and I accessed the rest by listening to the recording or by watching the video. The guidance given in Chan halls mostly reflected the situations at the time, and so are best examples to combine verbal teaching and actual practice. What impressed me the most was his talk on the Chapter on the Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the *Lotus Sutra*, given at the Queen Elizabeth Stadium in Hong Kong for three evenings in September, 1993. Hundreds of practitioners from Taiwan formed a group and traveled there together to listen to his talk, and I was assigned the task of noting down the Master's talk, which I later edited into a booklet entitled *Dharma Lectures on the Universal Gate of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in the Lotus Sutra*.

Also, what I find most special is the relationship between these teachings and my translation. In translating the Master's works, I tried my best to understand and realize the meaning of the content. Apart from the surface

meaning of the words, I also tried to recall how he gave his talk in the Chan hall, including his wording and humorous touch. I did my best to represent his talk and style, and re-enact the atmosphere in the Chan hall. Fortunately, these efforts of mine were not in vain. As the Master wrote in the foreword in his *Song of Mind*, “Shan Te-hsing has learned Chan practice with me for many years. He is good at both English and Chinese. His translation can best grasp the meaning of the original text, speak to Chinese readers, and faithfully reflect the interpretation of Chan literature. That’s why his translation is so popular in the Chinese speaking communities.” It is also due to these translation works of mine that I was able to form a relationship with Buddhist readers, which are different from academic writings. When I visited different Chinese communities I often received much praise from readers from those places. But I often say that the credit should go the Master. I only copy what I hear, in an effort to convey what the Master has to say. As to how to go about believing, accepting, upholding, and practicing, advancing in both intellectual study and actual practice, it will continue to be the most important task in my life.

## A Chan practitioner's example of making the most of every second

On many occasions I share the Master's teaching by example. Once, when I was a visiting scholar at the Harvard-Yenching Institute from 1994 to 1995, I took the Greyhound Bus from Boston and traveled to New York, to attend a seven-day Chan retreat with the Master at DDM Chan Meditation Center on the Memorial Day. Because there were few Chan practitioners in the USA, I became closer to the Master. At that time, I was assigned the chore of cleaning the bathroom and the Master's study. One day, at noon, I went to his study. I knocked at the door and entered the room, and happened to find the Master was spreading his mattress on the floor, ready to have a nap. I was astonished by this scene. At the time the construction of Dharma Drum Mountain had just begun, with considerable funds raised, but what I witnessed at Chan Meditation Center was a senior monk who didn't even have a bed to sleep on and had to make do with a mattress. Moreover, he was getting ready to have a nap, so the Master wasn't wearing his outer robe and so I saw him

bend over and sit on his knees, with his knee caps seeming about to poke through his trousers any time. I knew that he was not in good shape, but I had no idea that he was actually that thin, like a skeleton wearing a garment! That situation and scene really indeed shocked and touched me at the same time.

In late April 1996, the Master led a group of around 300 people to visit the Guangjiao Temple in Nantong, an ancestral Chan monastery where the Master became a novice, and the Jing'an Temple, where he advanced his study, as well as famous Buddhist attractions including Mt Jiuhua and Mt Putuo. We were there on a pilgrimage to visit some sacred Buddhist sites. The Master required us to apply the spirit of two seven-day meditation retreats to complete the whole journey of 14 days, by keeping silent as much as possible and observing public order. In our group we had a Dharma sister who had been a nurse. I learned from her that after a whole day's journey she had to help put the Master on a drip in his hotel room in very evening to replenish himself. Nevertheless, he always kept his smile in front of the group, and did what he had to do. Once,

when we were waiting for the ferry to cross the Yangzi River, while some of us were taking a short rest by closing their eyes and some were admiring the views, I took the chance to observe the Master: I saw him sit on the first row, writing swiftly in his little notebook. He didn't stop until our ferry arrived. He then tucked his notebook into his sleeve, and walked easily onboard with quick steps. This shows just how the Master cherished every opportunity and made the most of his time. That also explains why he was able to keep publishing travelogues and books despite his busy schedules. The details of that pilgrimage trip to Buddhist sites in the Jiangnan Area in China can be found in the Master's *A Lotus Flower at Every Step*, a travelogue that serves as a most cherished, shared spiritual record of what our pilgrimage group had seen, heard, and felt.

Afterwards, because the Master was still busy traveling around to share the Dharma, his health deteriorated and he had to be hospitalized frequently. But as long as the situation allowed, he would make an effort to attend and lead the Chan Retreat Camp for Prominent Professionals. Once, in the middle of our group practice, he shared one experience

in the hospital, about how he had actually died but was soon brought back to life. He mentioned it in a way as if he was telling a story of somebody else. We could relate to how dangerous it might be, but listening to how he described it at ease made us less worried. Nonetheless, his health continued to go downhill. The last time I saw the Master, he was already in poor condition and really needed his attendant's help to walk to the venue. He greeted us with a frail wave, and slowly looked at each and every of the participants, his eyes barely open. Seeing his weak and shaky body moving along indeed prompted us to shed tears.

## Acting as a blood transfusion tube to bring transformation to people

I remember during the pilgrimage to Buddhist sites in China, the Master often urged us to try to enter the inner world of ancestral masters and prominent monks in history. But lacking wisdom and spiritual cultivation, we could hardly relate to what it means by their “inner world,” let alone entering it. So at most we could only look at each other, guessing the possible answers while feeling greatly

ashamed of ourselves. With time passing by, especially after the Master passed away, when we attended his natural burial funeral ritual we heard his recorded Dharma talk, in which he humorously asked us, “What present are you bringing to me for your visit?” and he also said, “The universe may one day perish, yet my vows are eternal.” “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 pray for everyone to join forces to promote.” It was then that we could better understand what the Master had felt, but it was a shame that he already died.

Now growing in age, with a better knowledge of Buddhist teaching and human relationships, I can now better relate to the Master’s inner world. That is to devote our life and commit ourselves to spreading and sharing the Dharma for the benefit of self and others, by applying both compassion and wisdom to better the world and mature the spirituality of sentient beings. Simply speaking, it is to realize DDM’s ideal of “uplifting the character of humanity and building a pure land on earth.”

Now, besides using my own skills and expertise to fulfill my duties as a lay Buddhist practitioner, I devote myself to Buddhist teachings and the Master's compassionate vows, striving to grow in merit and wisdom, as well as cultivate good relationships with others. The Master liked to compare himself to a blood transfusion tube that serves to share the Dharma as taught by Sakyamuni Buddha, ancestral masters, and prominent monks in history, through his own understanding, absorption, and realization, and by putting it into words and language that speak to contemporary society and a modern audience. As the Master's disciple and translator, I may be able to compare myself as an extension of that blood transfusion tube.

Therefore, "Encounters with Master Sheng Yen" is to me about how a person originally ignorant of the Dharma began to access and approach Buddhist teaching, and later took the Three Refuges with the Master, from whom he received the guidance on Chan practice, and eventually treaded the Buddhist path of cultivation. I reckon I must have a deep karmic connection to be able to become the

Master's disciple and translator who has helped translated most of his works. Now in my 60s, I hope I can continue to be an extension of this "blood transfusion tube" as long as my time, capability, physical strength, effort, and aspiration allow it, to further enter the Master's inner world, as my share of effort to help spread and promote Buddhist teachings, making the most of my life.

*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)