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Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Venerable Miao You

00:02 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Miao You. This is Venerable Jue Fang continuing the interview with Venerable Miao You after a quick break. Thank you, Venerable Miao You, for coming back to this interview again. We ended off with NTI, the starting of NTI.

00:18 Venerable Jue Fang

Could you please continue on that? Your meeting with Professor John Loxton.

00:24 Venerable Miao You

Thank you. The starting of the Nan Tien Institute and to establish that as a higher education provider, we have met with many challenges. So, first of all, we have nothing to start with. So, and, it is only with the affinity of many people, who helped us fund wide and to see that they also see our challenges, but most importantly, they saw the aspiration of the late Master Hsing Yun, that they wanted to help us.

01:21 Venerable Miao You

So, as we all know that our late Master Hsing Yun do not, he did not receive any formal schooling or education. And so that was his aspirations that everyone should be educated so that they can live better lives. It changes a life for a better future.

01:43 Venerable Miao You

And with this aspiration, he built five universities in the world. And with our Nan Tien Institute, because we did not have the resource for, resources in the beginning, hmm, we will, we met with a lot of challenges and people tried to take advantage of us, because we do not know. We have no knowledge of how to get started.

02:24 Venerable Miao You

But it was the good affinity of some students who introduced me to Professor John Loxton. And we, we sort of explore Master Hsing Yun education. We break it down and explained to him why we wanted to establish a higher education in Australia.

02:59 Venerable Miao You

And he also saw that, you know, there was a vacuum in higher education in Australia that we can provide Buddhism in a very informed manner. So, it is not that we wanted to convert people to be Buddhists, but to inform the general public or to inform the

mainstream Australians about Buddhist philosophy, the wisdom, and the share in the Buddhist values and the virtues.

03:37 Venerable Miao You

And so, this is how in 2010, the Nan Tien Institute was established as the first secular higher education provider grounded in Buddhist values and wisdom. So, our mission for Nan Tien Institute is to educate in a context that is informed by Buddhist values, and to foster their academic study through reflection and experiential learning, in order to make constructive¹ contributions to the humanity and society.

04:20 Venerable Miao You

So, the courses that we have in the beginning was actually quite slim. We only had one course to start with, which is Applied Buddhist Studies. And so this course would not only teach or to educate Buddhist wisdom, but to do it in a manner which they can always self-reflect, and and to make ethical decisions, you know, for the better of society.

05:05 Venerable Miao You

So, people like, we have mindfulness, we have mindfulness course, mindfulness theory and practice. We have Buddhism and psychotherapy. We have health and Buddhist philosophy. So, these courses would inform students as to, to live in a way, that would benefit their, their whole well-being and to, to inform them in the context of the Buddhist philosophy on compassion as well as loving-kindness.

05:51 Venerable Miao You

So, in the beginning when we set up as a higher education provider, we got to get our governance together, the board of directors and our committees and that was a very challenging part as well, because we don't know enough people in the Australian context.

06:16 Venerable Miao You

So, we actually went to Taiwan as well to seek help, to establish or, or to form these committees. And so, the Dean was to be Professor John Loxton and we need a head of program for our Applied Buddhist Studies.

06:39 Venerable Miao You

So, our head of program was to be Venerable Yung Dong. So even though she doesn't reside in Australia, but we can do it, sort of, you know, online. And then she agreed to be the head of our program. Professor John Loxton helped to document all this in writing so that we can submit to the Department of Education.

¹ A slip of the tongue, here should be "make conscious contributions to the humanity and society."

07:13 Venerable Miao You

So, we have to to, in order to apply for the accreditation, we have to have the curriculum. We have to have the guarantee. And we also have to have a business plan. So, we did a 10-year business plan and that was done by another professor who helped us to formulate and put this together.

07:40 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, so we, we probably did that in 2010. We started in 2009 and it was my hope that everything would get done by the end of 2009, but that didn't happen. So, we went to 2010 already, in the beginning of 2010. So, people are dragging the chain and because I think for them the longer they drag it, the more money they will get out of us. But I, I was very impatient, so I didn't want to drag on anymore.

08:23 Venerable Miao You

So, I think on the 21st of January, January 2010, I made an announcement to all those involved, and I said that nobody leaves until we get this done. And I said, you will have to stay at the lodge, because I really wanted to get it done very quickly. And it's already, like, we skipped one year already. And anyway, we achieved our goal.

08:53 Venerable Miao You

So, in 2010 at the end of January or 21st January 2010, we actually submitted our application to the Department of Education in New South Wales. So that was because the TEQSA wasn't formed then. And it was my understanding that we were approved at the end of September 2010. And so, we got all our resources together to help, to help us to start and establish and have our opening, to start teaching our course in 2011.

09:41 Venerable Miao You

So, on the 27th of February 2011, we have our opening ceremony and we have many people who came, benefactors, local community and also a lot of professors from the University of Wollongong came to congratulate us.

10:07 Venerable Miao You

So, I'd like to acknowledge the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong then, Professor Gerard Sutton, the Deputy Chancellor of Academics was Professor Robert Castle. And there was also other professors who really helped us and with the accreditation process. Because it was, as you can see, that we have very limited resources in Nan Tien Institute. And to be able to convince the department that we are able to start a master's course in Applied Buddhist Studies wasn't really easy. And, but they, I think they trust in

us maybe because we are a Buddhist community and also they have the trust in the professors in the Western² in University of Wollongong.

11:06 Venerable Miao You

They even agreed to give us access to the library in the University of Wollongong for our students. So, they gave us a lot of conveniences. And so, I, I like to really be, I am grateful and thank them for their contribution.

11:30 Venerable Miao You

At the time the governance of Nan Tien Institute was very weak. So, in the early days, we don't have many people, or I should say the right calibre of people on our board. But I'd like to thank people like, you know, Professor Lewis Lancaster, then there was, the Senator from Victoria, Tsebin Tchen, and people like Ian Buchanan and they really, they're willing to give us their time and share in their experience and expertise and thus making, forming the governance and the board of the Nan Tien Institute.

12:18 Venerable Miao You

So, we are very grateful for, you know, this affinity and the people that help us. There were also many students that helped us in, to connect with the local community. That we have a student called Professor Christine Ewan and she was also a Vice Deputy Chancellor from the University of Western Sydney.

12:48 Venerable Miao You

So, she came and studied Applied Buddhist Studies. And I think the course that really attracted her was Buddhism and Art and the mindfulness. And she was the one who introduced Professor Bill Lovegrove to the course. And so, Bill came to study as a Graduate Certificate in Applied Buddhist Studies. And after he graduated from the Graduate Certificate, we actually offered him a position to be the President of Nan Tien Institute and so he always like, he make a joke and to say that look, you know, one of the ways that you can get a job, if after the Graduate Certificate, or after the Master's in Applied Buddhist Studies, you know, you can apply to be a President. And that was, that was a joke.

14:02 Venerable Miao You

But because the Applied Buddhist Studies isn't a qualification that you would get a job. And you know, you cannot sort of promote your career in in many other profession. Getting students to study in this course was not an easy task. And so, when...And so Master Hsing Yun understood this and he asked us, you know, at the opening of the Nan Tien Institute in 2015, he asked, 'What else can I do for the Nan Tien Institute?' And

² A slip of the tongue. Here should be the University of Wollongong.

Professor John Loxton said, 'Yeah, we need students and we need good teachers.' And so, he donated a million dollars for the NTI scholarship fund to give students, you know, the opportunity to study at the Nan Tien Institute.

15:14 Venerable Miao You

So, I would like to probably go back to the site, remediation of the site to establish, to to let you understand how we establish the site and what do we have to do to get the site ready for building. So, this all happened in the same time when we are getting the educational and the accreditation application, was in 2009 to 2010.

15:54 Venerable Miao You

But as far as the site is concerned, the the physical site, we met with many challenges. So, one of them was that at the Wollongong Council in 2008. So, due to Council's councillors' corruption, the Wollongong Council was abolished.

16:23 Venerable Miao You

And so, we no longer have a council, a local council. But it was replaced by three administrators from the New South Wales State Government. So, I think these three administrators are not permanently here. So, they maybe come one or two days a week to look at important things, making decisions and whatsoever.

16:53 Venerable Miao You

So, under that administration, Nan Tien Institute, our site D/A application, it means development application, was probably put aside in the too hard basket. So, we never, we haven't heard from them for a long time, even though in 2006 was the time that we submitted our D/A application.

17:20 Venerable Miao You

So, it never got approved or rejected. So, it was just sitting there. So, in the meantime, we have raised a lot of money to prepare us to build a Nan Tien Institute, but nothing happened. And probably in 2009, or maybe 2010 actually, because for us to start work on the, on the site, we got to have a D/A approved before we can start work.

17:58 Venerable Miao You

And we know, in the meantime, like our construction team had a plan of what we need to do to prepare the site to be built. So, we had not had any solid, like proposal from the council to say that yes, you can do it.

18:21 Venerable Miao You

These are the conditions you need to fulfill or what, because there's no D/A approval. And our headquarters keep asking when is the Nan Tien Temple³, Nan Tien Institute going to be built? But Master keep asking when's the bridge⁴ going to be built?

18:44 Venerable Miao You

Because he keep thinking that when we build the bridge, then we build the Institute. So, the building comes later. But for us, we thought that if we don't have the building, there's no point building a bridge. Because the bridge goes to nowhere. Nothing.

19:02 Venerable Miao You

So, this is our thinking. But anyway, we have to keep moving, right, to get moving. But our application that went into the council, the phase one was building the bridge. Phase two was the building, because that's according to Master Hsing Yun plan.

19:22 Venerable Miao You

And then, that was like, the plan or the D/A to the Council. Then later on, with a lot of consultation from consultants and all that, and then, it was decided that we should build the building first because then we can remediate the land.

19:44 Venerable Miao You

And, but with nothing from the council, we can't do anything. And so, Venerable Yi Lai, which is the Abbess then of Nan Tien Temple and myself, we thought of a plan to invite the three administrators to the Nan Tien Temple, and I prepared a PowerPoint presentation and we presented to, I think only two came out of the three. And we presented to them our plan for the Nan Tien Institute, what we're going to teach, how it benefit the local community, and the sort of jobs that we would open up to the local community, and also how many jobs you will create for building the Nan Tien institute.

20:48 Venerable Miao You

And so, I think they were impressed, but I said the biggest issue was that if you don't approve our D/A, then we have to refund all the money back to our donors. Because we can't hold the money for so many years and then nothing happened. Because we are accountable to our donors. And so, they took it in.

21:19 Venerable Miao You

So, within two or three weeks, we got D/A approved. And with that D/A approval, we can start compaction. So, we already have looked into the market for someone to help us with

³ A slip of the tongue. Here should be the Nan Tien Institute.

⁴ The Nan Tien Bridge, after 17 years of planning and construction, was completed and put into use on July 28, 2018. It serves as both a physical and symbolic link, bringing Buddhist culture to Wollongong and its students and fostering a lasting impact.

the compaction. So, we did hire the services of Coastwide Construction and they did the compaction for, I think for a long time, more than 10 months. Sorry, the contract was for 38 weeks, which is 10 months, but it took longer than 10 months. I think it took about a year to complete that compaction.

22:11 Venerable Miao You

You see, the compaction was difficult, because some of the land, the holes that when you compact, you have a very big heavy machine to, to go into the ground, so that was very, it was very noisy actually. So, you can actually hear it from that side when they compacting the ground here.

22:38 Venerable Miao You

They go very low⁵, six to ten meters deep. So, the holes were six to ten meters deep. So, after the compaction, you see, they have to fill up. They have to fill it back up. Because we were going to build a bridge. So, they have to bring it back up to the level of the Front Shrine, so that the bridge can go over.

23:05 Venerable Miao You

So, at least, you know, it was originally RL34, but they bring it up all the way to RL38, so that means so many meters higher. So, the deeper the hole, the more you have to fill in, right? So how do, we don't have that much money, how can you fill up so high? What you're gonna put in it? You're gonna put pebbles, sand, blue metal, right?

23:41 Venerable Miao You

So, all that costs money, you see, and the site is quite big. So, the whole area was 29 acres that was given to us, like, for the dollar that we bought this site, 29 acres. But half the land was contaminated. So, if we imagine 14 acres of it is contaminated, that would be a lot of area to fill up. And I think with Buddha's blessing, we have very good consultants that would think for us, how to save money or how to make it work.

24:26 Venerable Miao You

You know, and they thought that. Oh, at that time Illawarra Coal was, the State Government was imposing on all these coal company a levy of 30 dollars per ton for coal wash. Because when they, when they get the coal off the ground, they need to wash the part that is not usable.

⁵ A slip of the tongue, here should be "They went very deep."

24:52 Venerable Miao You

So, they only take the usable part of the coal and then they will sell that. But the coal wash is the outer layer or the skin, all right, that cannot be used. So, they chuck it away. So, if you chuck that away, you will have to pay a levy of \$30 a ton.

25:12 Venerable Miao You

But if you use it, then it's free. You don't have to pay. And so, we were lucky enough that we can use the coal wash. And our consultant from Cardno, his name was Anthony Barthelmess. So, he negotiated with this Illawarra Coal or these coal companies around to deliver the coal wash to us.

25:44 Venerable Miao You

Okay, they deliver 500,000 tons of coal wash to us free of charge. But the thing is that Coastwide, this company that is doing the civil construction, they gonna have to fill it in for us, right?

26:03 Venerable Miao You

But the troublesome, the massy part of that coal wash, is that, once it's washed, it's wet, yeah? But they cannot send it to us wet. We can only use it when it's dry. So, there is another process to dry that coal wash first before they can be brought to our site.

26:29 Venerable Miao You

So, there are many, many processes involved, but it is the good affinity of the Nan Tien Temple, I guess, that these people are willing to do all these extra work for us for free. So, we got all this coal wash for free.

26:53 Venerable Miao You

And then, these people have to do extra work to clear, to dry, to, you know. Hmm, and then that's how it got established. And they will fill up to a certain level. And then after that, they will put sand and all the different level. It acts like a filter.

27:13 Venerable Miao You

It even have a thing called geo-fabric, which is like a filter, a cloth that goes underneath. And this cloth cannot be damaged, right? It cannot be damaged. So, we have to be very careful that when we dig the Nan Tien Institute ground, not to, like penetrate too deep into the area, otherwise we will penetrate the cloth.

27:44 Venerable Miao You

And so, in that ground, there were also asbestos were discovered that when they were throwing the rubbish, they were dumping asbestos, which is a very toxic material. And we

have to also contain that in the ground and not, I don't know if we did transport some away to be, to be disposed of, but it was very expensive to dispose of the asbestos.

28:19 Venerable Miao You

So, we make a, like, a concrete box for it, like a coffin. So, we did have asbestos buried in our ground in a certain area marked on the map, so that council or everybody would know where it was. And that cannot be dug up.

28:41 Venerable Miao You

So, contamination land is not that simple. It's not like, oh, you know, this only rubbish, you can just dig it out throw it away. It's not like that. So, anything from the ground cannot be disposed of. Even one drop of water in that contamination ground cannot be, like, filtered into neighbouring land.

29:09 Venerable Miao You

So, that's another issue that I want to talk about, which is the water issue. So, for many, many years, Australia was in drought. So, when there's drought, there's no water, there's hardly any rain. But the year we started to work on the site, we had so much rain.

29:30 Venerable Miao You

There's so much rainfall. It's unbelievable. Just like now, there's so much of water. So, what do we do when the water filtered into our contamination land and it will flow into the water system, right?

29:46 Venerable Miao You

But because our land is contaminated, we have to treat the water before it goes out into the water system. And how do we do that? Sydney Water will treat our water, right? They go through a filter, a pipe and a pump.

30:07 Venerable Miao You

It will go into the treatment plant. They will charge us six cents per litre. And if you can imagine how much water comes out from the land when it rains, it's pouring. So, it rains a lot. And that's why the whole project, in a way, was delayed at least for a year because of the rain.

30:35 Venerable Miao You

Every time it needs to dry, and you know, the compaction also has to dry before you can put the coal wash. So, everything took a long time. And it was the good affinity again and with Buddha's blessing.

30:53 Venerable Miao You

So, this consultant taught of an idea. They built a leachate pond. OK. The leachate pond is built at the lowest part of our land, right? Because then it can collect the water. That leachate pond is very close to the Lady Penrhyn Drive, which is opposite TNT. Now, it's the TNT, TNT is like, a courier company.

31:25 Venerable Miao You

So, that was the premises that was the lowest in the area. The owner always complained to the Council that our water flow into the land. But the water flow onto the land is surface water, okay. But they don't care.

31:49 Venerable Miao You

They said your water flow into my land, therefore your contamination comes into my land. So, they wanted to sue us. And Council said that, you know, you have to prove that your water is not contaminated.

32:03 Venerable Miao You

So, we did that once, we did that twice, and then they keep coming. So, one day suddenly, a light bulb enlightened, and said that well, you said that my water flow into your land is contaminated. So, I want you to prove it.

32:23 Venerable Miao You

You prove it to me that my water that flow onto your land was contaminated and then I will do something about it. Because every time for me to prove that my water is not contaminated, I cost, I incur cost.

32:39 Venerable Miao You

It cost my consultants, you know, all this paperwork, all these reports cost money. So, if you think that my water is contaminated, you're gonna prove it to me and then I can do something about it.

32:54 Venerable Miao You

So, after that, it stops. There's no more complain because they don't want to incur cost. And so, then we can get on with our life, get on with the work. Now, this water, this very big pond is what we call a leachate pond.

33:15 Venerable Miao You

So, the water were flowed into that land, that pond. When it's raining very heavily, the water level will rise. Okay. The water that level rise, we have a device that will phone us and our maintenance people that the water level is rising.

33:42 Venerable Miao You

You either, you know, you need to turn, flip the switch so that the water, instead of flowing over to your neighbouring land, it will flow into the treatment plant. And that's what we have to do. So, there was once or twice that really the water was very, very high and we can't take that risk.

34:05 Venerable Miao You

So, we flipped the switch that when the level come up to that high, the water will go into the treatment plant. But most of the time, we always manage to keep it, like, below, even though the sound was beeping all the time.

34:22 Venerable Miao You

So, people like our maintenance supervisor, at that time it was Michael Talbot. You know, he was harassed by that phone call all the time, you know, the beeping on his mobile phone, that tells him that the water level is rising.

34:43 Venerable Miao You

And it had cost, we had saved us a lot of money, but that plant also cost a lot of money to build and the device was over \$100,000. So, there is a little shed there that monitors and you have to have electricity, you have to have all these controls put in place for that to happen.

35:09 Venerable Miao You

So, until today, right? We don't have this water problem. Because after we built this, like, 10 years already, the water is quite good. The water level, it's not the water level, the water content, right, is quite good.

35:33 Venerable Miao You

There's not much ammonia or lead so they all meet the normal range. But we have to continue to supply to Water Sydney and the annual report to the Environmental Planning Assessment Department that we got all this contamination under control.

36:01 Venerable Miao You

So, even today, we are still spending money on that land. And also, the air, the methane gas, it has to be monitored all the time. So, every two months, we send a report to the Environmental Department.

36:22 Venerable Miao You

So, like, even this land, even if you think that, you know, everything is done, it should be good. But the cost continues, it's ongoing. So, it's 10 years now. We've got up to 2028. I

watched this, we've got four more years to go, before we, they will give us an assessment to say, yes, it's fine now, you don't have to do it, or maybe you continue for another few years.

36:59 Venerable Miao You

So, that's why this remediation thing is ongoing. So, it never stops. And yeah, I would like to acknowledge and thank all these wonderful people to help us succeed, you know. And in Master Hsing Yun's dream of establishing the Nan Tien Institute here in our local community.

37:31 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Miao You. I think a lot of wisdom and resilience has been put into actualise the Nan Tien Institute. So, the Nan Tien Institute had also a Nan Tien bridge. Could you tell us more about the Nan Tien bridge that you mentioned?

37:49 Venerable Miao You

Well. Master Hsing Yun always said that we need to build the bridge first, right? He has great insight, because he knows that the bridge is not just a physical bridge. The bridge is the one that links the Nan Tien Institute to the Temple.

38:06 Venerable Miao You

So, if we don't have the bridge, then the Nan Tien Institute will not be able to sustain as an institution. So, he sees that bridge like a mother to a child, that it provides guidance, insight and actually financial support. Because without the mother giving the support, you know, the child would not be able to establish itself so quickly.

38:39 Venerable Miao You

We know that most higher education institutions would take 30 to 50 years, or 100 years to be able, to be well known, like, universities like Oxford University, you know, Stanford, Harvard, you know, how many years do they take to establish themselves.

39:00 Venerable Miao You

And so, he understood this. And so, the bridge is just not a physical connection, it is a spiritual connection as well. So, we always say that the Nan Tien Temple is Eastern, and the Institute would be a Western connection that we can build knowledge with wisdom.

39:26 Venerable Miao You

And we can bring the tradition with the modernity. We also connect the community of Nan Tien to the mainstream people. Because as we know that a lot of people in Australia are not Buddhists, and they came to visit the Temple as, like, because of curiosity.

39:54 Venerable Miao You

Some people are even too afraid to come to the temple. But with the Nan Tien Institute, because it being the first secular higher education provider that was based on Buddhist wisdom, people are more inclined to come in and to check it out and to have a look.

40:15 Venerable Miao You

I guess this is why we have the Institute. So, the bridge took a long time as well. We know that working with government agencies are one of the most difficult things. So, besides the Council, the Council says they don't care about the bridge because it's not their department.

40:45 Venerable Miao You

So, the bridge is under the Department of Transport. In those days, it is called RTO, the Road Transport Authority or something, RTA, sorry, RTA. And then it become RMS, means Roads Maritime Services, and now it's just called the Department of Transport.

41:10 Venerable Miao You

Because our bridge is the airspace over a freeway, six-lane freeway. So, this airspace had to be leased. So, we actually have to lease the airspace. Not in money. We don't have to pay them money, but we have to guarantee.

41:31 Venerable Miao You

So, in the beginning, when we wanted to build the bridge, yeah, and then when you put in our D/A, the first phase was the bridge. We negotiated with the RTA and they said we got to put a \$2 million bank guarantee with them.

41:58 Venerable Miao You

In case we don't comply with the maintenance, or keep up with their requirements, they have the right to demolish the bridge. And the \$2 million is for them to demolish our bridge. And so, we find that conditions very unfriendly, and it's like too much, and so we didn't pursue it.

42:30 Venerable Miao You

But Master Hsing Yun keeps asking when the bridge will be ready, and we never even started negotiations. And I think it's back in 20? 2010? No. Uh, when was that? 2015. 2015. After the building was established, we opened the building of Nan Tien Institute on the 1st of March 2015. And at that time, somehow, we managed to invite the Prime Minister, the Honourable Tony Abbott, to come for the opening.

43:17 Venerable Miao You

So, there was representation from the State Government, Federal, you know, the Prime Minister was here, so everyone was here. It was a very hot day, was something like 40, 40 something degrees, and we have over 5,000 people.

43:34 Venerable Miao You

So, the whole place was like, very busy, very excited, and all that. So, it attracts a lot of media attention. So, the whole of New South Wales knew we, knew about this Nan Tien Institute, but what it's all about, they probably don't know.

43:56 Venerable Miao You

So, one day, we ran into the people that I used to meet at the Department of RTA, Department of Transport, and he said, 'I thought you're going to build a bridge.' And I said, yeah, we were going to, but because we cannot accept your conditions, so we're going to, like, let it go.

44:18 Venerable Miao You

And they said that maybe you should think about it. And I said, well, you know, your conditions change, then we can consider. So, I think we mentioned that to the Minister for Parramatta, okay, Dr. Geoff Lee, and he said that he was going to call, a kind of like, the ministers will meet the community.

44:45 Venerable Miao You

He said, like, you know, have your say, meet the ministers, or something like that. So, he organised a meeting like that in Parramatta. And yeah, so I went there with my proposal for the bridge, a very rough sketched proposal and what it looked like and all that.

45:07 Venerable Miao You

So, I went to meet the minister. He wasn't the Minister of Transport then, it was somebody else. Because you can't pick and choose while there were so many people all wanting to meet the Minister. So anyway, I can't remember his name or anything like that.

45:25 Venerable Miao You

But he said that, oh, he thinks that it was a wonderful project. And then it will put like, Wollongong and the Illawarra on the map, and it will be a milestone. And he liked what we were going to do, our proposal.

45:43 Venerable Miao You

And he said he will speak to the Minister of Transport. And I think that got it going. So, the RTA or the RMS then in Wollongong contacted me. And we set up a meeting with the architect, our project manager and ourselves.

46:07 Venerable Miao You

So, we explore on how, what the bridge look like, and what it would do for the community, and all that. And so that got started. But one major obstacle is the power poles. Okay, the power pole was right where the bridge was going to be.

46:33 Venerable Miao You

So, we need to move at least two power poles, and had to build new ones as well, because the other two were already rotting or something. And so, a lot of negotiations were on the way, not just the airspace over the land, we have to sign a work, a work deed, a deed of works or something.

47:01 Venerable Miao You

And then we have to, we still have to have guarantee, but the guarantee was not like \$2 million fixed. So, the guarantee was much more acceptable. So, it was like a million dollars at first. And then when it's built, it goes to, after it's built, practical completion.

47:25 Venerable Miao You

So, the million dollars would go down to \$400,000. And then after \$400,000, a year after that, you go down to \$200,000. And then now, we still have a bank guarantee over that, it's \$100,000. And so, it was more acceptable.

47:44 Venerable Miao You

So, in case anything happen, right? If we can't afford to do it, so they can use that \$100,000. They can apply that money to do the maintenance or the renovation or to make good. So, we accepted those conditions and we started to negotiations on the deed.

48:09 Venerable Miao You

But the power poles was the one that kept us going for a long time because nobody from the integral energy or the electricity people, they don't want to do anything. So, because we are moving high voltage power as well, which is very dangerous and costly and all that.

48:32 Venerable Miao You

So, you wouldn't believe that those power poles and moving them and all that will cost another million dollars. So, like, and the trouble is to raise that awareness with the Department and say, look, we're going to do this.

48:54 Venerable Miao You

Can somebody get back to us? What do we have to do? Like, what are the, how do we collaborate? Okay. Nobody, nobody answer us. It probably took nearly one year. So, the project manager ring every week, and then later on they said, look, I've been ringing a whole year, nothing happens.

49:19 Venerable Miao You

So, I said, okay, I will do it. So, I started from the Council. I said, who is in charge? Give me the name. I'll call him. And it took a long time for a few weeks later, they said, this is the person that you can call.

49:36 Venerable Miao You

So, I chased after this person also for about a week or two. And then finally, he responded and I said, look, your department is holding a major project in the Illawarra. This is what we're doing. This is going to create employment.

49:54 Venerable Miao You

And you guys have not responded. You know, we've been chasing you for a whole year. All the correspondence, the consultants, you know, have been, you know, writing emails to you people, but you don't respond.

50:08 Venerable Miao You

You don't respond by email. You don't respond phone calls. I said, you know, what is your department doing? So, after one month, he come back and said, yes, we're ready to talk. We'll send somebody to you, and we can do this, this, this and this.

50:28 Venerable Miao You

So, we got that going and I think it took about six months for the power line to be shifted and all that. But in the meantime, we have to create and make new power poles. So, these power poles are new, it cost 45,000 dollars each.

50:51 Venerable Miao You

Anyway, so this bridge, so we started to connect with our consultants, and we had the best company to build the bridge for us. The name is Abergeldie. It's a, they say it's a French company, but I think it's a Scottish company and they are one of the biggest in New South Wales.

51:24 Venerable Miao You

So, for the consultants⁶, for the contractors to build our bridge, it has to be approved by the Department of Transport. It's not anyone can come and tender for the job. So, we have to pick our tenders. And after we pick the tender, the accepted consultant, we need to check with the Department to make sure that they do approve of this company.

51:55 Venerable Miao You

So, yeah, we do have the best company to build the bridge. And, so, there were a lot of challenges as well. So, this bridge is actually a hundred and thirteen meters long, the extra part hundred and thirty meter long, and divided into three sections.

51:23 Venerable Miao You

It took many many nights for them to close the traffic, close one part of traffic and put it together. And on the night that this was happening. We had many devotees and the people involved to watch, to see that, to put the first slap down, right? But of course, it's not over one night. It took many nights. I think it took a few weeks for them to complete the connection.

53:00 Venerable Miao You

So, they put one side, then they have to stabilise it from the mid pier. Then they go to the other side, stabilise it, and then the middle part. So, it was such a relief, you know, when the three sections actually connect.

53:21 Venerable Miao You

So, after they finish that, then they started to do the concrete. See, the concrete had to be done in situ, right? Because they had to do it then, and it's not something that they can prepare on site and then put it together. No. So it has to be done in situ.

53:37 Venerable Miao You

So, it's a very challenging work. And, yeah, I always like, you know, thank the conditions and affinity that people are willing to work at that risk, you know, such risks in the middle of the night at cold conditions. Because it also happened about May, June. Yeah, and to get it all done, and to fulfill, you know, our aspirations and vision that we are linking the Temple with the Institute.

54:13 Venerable Miao You

So, it's all very very special. Yeah. To me, it's like impossible. But the impossible is also possible, when you put your mind to it. So, one of our devotees, you know, Cecilia, who

⁶ A slip of the tongue. Here should be "the contractors to build our bridge".

was really very involved in the early days with the building of the Institute. Well, she was there to witness it and she was so happy.

54:47 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Miao You. That was actually quite a touching recount of what you have participated and put forward. So, you have been with the Temple for around 25 to 30 years. Could you? (Ven. Miao You: No, 20. 20.) 20 years? (Ven. Miao You: 20. Yeah, 20 odd years. Yeah.) 20 odd years. (Ven. Miao You: Since 1999, when I first came into the temple.) Yeah. 25 years?

55:17 Venerable Jue Fang

So, could you share with us the challenges that you have actually encountered throughout. Whether it's a personal challenge, or a work challenge, or some of the difficulties that you met, and also maybe some of the special moments that really impacted you.

55:41 Venerable Miao You

Well, I think the person, my personal challenge would be, first of all, is the communication, because I'm not able to express so well in Chinese. Hmm, and it's difficult for people to understand me. Because if we come from different culture, you know, I still say it's a different culture.

56:13 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, so Western and Asian culture. So, I actually considered myself Western culture, that's one of the reasons why I feel like I fitted very well in Australian society, and I don't fit in the Singapore society.

56:35 Venerable Miao You

So, that's my personal challenge. As far as Temple's challenge is concerned, I think it's still communication, because the Temple's demography is from like Asian, Western, and now, recently, we have a lot of like Indian culture.

57:01 Venerable Miao You

And to be able to reach out to all this very cosmopolitan culture is not an easy task. I wouldn't say it's impossible. It's just not so easy. It will take some time for us to be more humble. I think, I think as monastics, I think some people are more, I wouldn't say arrogant, but just not so down-to-earth, to reach down to the public image. Excuse me. (Venerable Miao You is coughing.)

58:21 Venerable Miao You

Hmm, sometimes it's also like even within our intra-faith, you know, within Buddhist community, Theravada, Mahayana, Tibetan. Also that, you know, we are not prepared to understand their perspective. So, I think that will be one of the areas that we can improve on.

58:52 Venerable Miao You

And then inter-faith is concerned, you know, there is also a very big challenge like Muslim, and Hindu, and all this Bahá'í and all that. So, we tend to be quite dismissal, sometimes, of other faiths. Yeah. So that's why I think, you know, humility must come into play.

59:19 Venerable Miao You

And you know, I think if you look at the ways that the late Master Hsing Yun bring the gods and the Shenming, the gods and the (Ven. Jue Fang: Deities.) Taoists, the deities, right, into Fo Guang Shan.

59:42 Venerable Miao You

Yeah, I think we should be also more welcoming and accommodating. Because like, it's not, our way is not the only way. There are many ways that we can live in harmony. Yeah.

1:00:06 Venerable Jue Fang

So, would you like to share a moment or a story of transformation and impact that has tremendous impact on you, that you have experienced over the last 25 years in the Temple?

1:00:27 Venerable Miao You

I think again, you know, communication, mindfulness and that, if we want to reach out to people, so we need to be able to come down to whoever's level, to the level. I remember there was a book in leadership, *The Servant*. So, if you want to lead, you got to be the servant first.

1:00:51 Venerable Miao You

It's like what Master Hsing Yun always said, you know, you be the volunteers' volunteer. So, if you want to invite volunteers, you want to nurture, and cultivate, you know, this group of people, then you have to be at the level, you have to be ready to serve.

1:01:13 Venerable Miao You

So, I think from that perspective, you know, for us to think in positive ways. So, I remember as a teacher, you know, some teachers already have preconceived ideas or

assumptions of the students. They said, oh, don't worry about this group of students, they will never learn, because they're not interested in learning.

1:01:39 Venerable Miao You

So, I always think that, you know, we should have an open mind. Because you can't paint the whole painting with the same brush, you know. You have to be more open. And so, I think, for me, a story of transformation is that we should treat everyone with respect, ethics, alright, to be moral, ethics, to be kind, and also, I think mindfulness comes to play with that.

1:02:14 Venerable Miao You

So, this particular student, which I hope that we can interview him, and in our documentary or something. So, his name is Michael, and he first came to our Nan Tien Temple on a one-day retreat. And we didn't know him, right, but later on, he told me that, that was his last straw.

1:02:40 Venerable Miao You

He said he had tried everything. He went to lots of doctors, and psychologists, and psychiatrists, and they gave him the pill. And the more he took the pill, the harder it is for him to function as a functional human being. And he's still drinking. He said he drink a bottle of bourbon a day. You know a bottle of bourbon, 40% alcohol.

1:03:07 Venerable Miao You

So, and he has like, bad liver problems and all that. And he was going to die basically. And his boss was not happy with him and family, don't have to say, his wife, his kids are all scared of him. Because he said he would erupt into like a fury, a rage for no reason.

1:03:36 Venerable Miao You

So, he becomes very unpopular at home. He said this was his last straw. He said to his wife, do you mind if I become a Buddhist? But actually, he meant that do you mind if I go to the Temple. But he just blurted out, do you mind if I become a Buddhist.

1:03:54 Venerable Miao You

And so, his wife said, you know, whatever it takes for you, you know, to become a real person now, I don't mind if you're Buddhist or not. So, he came to a one-day retreat. So, in this one-day retreat, I don't know like, what I was saying about. Maybe I talked about many things, right? Sort of how to be a human being, how to watch and listen to your negative thoughts, right?

1:04:27 Venerable Miao You

So, the thinking and actually what holds us back from being a Buddha is our greed, anger, ignorance, so the three poisons. So, actually that resonated with him. So, that was the thing that that saying that wow, you know, I keep drinking all the time, because I like drinking and that I must be greedy.

1:04:54 Venerable Miao You

So, he resonated with that greed, his desires, he can't stop, right. And so, he sees, like, a weakness within himself, and that's when he first start to gain awareness and insight to himself.

1:05:13 Venerable Miao You

He said normally he is a very arrogant person. He's always right. You know, that his way is the only way. So, he said he had a lot of problems at work because of his way of thinking. And so, he keep coming back, and then he understood that we have Buddhism classes and meditation on Wednesday, and he lives about an hour away from here.

1:05:42 Venerable Miao You

He lives at Engadine. So, for Engadine to drive here, it's at least 50 minutes. So, he comes every Wednesday for his Buddhism class and meditation. And he did that for about two years. I mean, he's still continuing. But for him to stop drinking, he said he cut back on his drinking.

1:06:09 Venerable Miao You

Instead of drinking, like, one bottle of bourbon a day, he might do that maybe once a week. So, do you know what I mean? Instead of every day, it's once a week. So, he cut back. And then he said he cut back like that and then slowly, maybe after five years or so, he completely stopped drinking.

1:06:31 Venerable Miao You

And today he said to me, you know, the only time since that time I touched alcohol was the day when his son was 21 years birthday celebration. He said he had a wine, or he had a beer or something. He said only one and that's it.

1:06:52 Venerable Miao You

So, he said now, he's able to control his tendency. So instead of drinking everything or to drink until he dropped, he just drink when he wants to. He choose to drink, and he knew he was drinking. It's not like by habit.

1:07:13 Venerable Miao You

Well, he's still around today. He help us to be my assistant or Venerable Zhi Li, when we run our retreats. And he has taken the precepts, alright. And he was ready to join our BLIA⁷. So that was a transformation story.

1:07:44 Venerable Miao You

A big one. A great one. And there were also other transformation story of people who have lots of anger and they become mindful of their thinking, their thoughts and they're able to hold back. So, emotional management.

1:08:04 Venerable Miao You

And that all stems from being mindful. And so, his practice pay off. So, we have a lot of people like that. And we also have people who have cancer. People who suffer from cancer, I always say to them it's only, like, most people have cancer. But they don't develop to be real cancerous is because they have the ability to let go of the negative emotions which affects the cells generation.

1:08:44 Venerable Miao You

So, if you are negative, and you are emotional, you're angry, you will generate cancerous cells, or the cells will start the cancer that you got or the any sick cells that are sick will generate and become cancerous.

1:09:04 Venerable Miao You

But if you are happy and positive and the cancerous cells will never become cancerous. And I know a few people had cancer and now no longer have cancer.

1:09:28 Venerable Jue Fang

So, I'm sure people like Michael, their experiences will be a testament to the hard work and effort that you have put in, in the past 25 years. So, what is your vision for the next phase of Nan Tien Temple?

1:09:46 Venerable Jue Fang

As we are, as Nan Tien Temple is celebrating the 30th Anniversary, what would you see Nan Tien Temple in the next phase?

1:09:55 Venerable Miao You

I think the first 30 years, or up to now, the Nan Tien Temple has been very successful. In... It's successful, I won't say that, you know, of course there is always room for improvement,

⁷ Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) is an organisation organised by Buddhist devotees. On May 16, 1992, the BLIA World Headquarters was established in Los Angeles, US. Now, BLIA have been successively established in more than a hundred countries and regions across five continents to promote Humanistic Buddhism and spread joy all over the world. <https://www.nantien.org.au/en/about-us/blia>

but we have so far been rather successful in reaching out to the community, at least in the last, you know, five to ten years. It's much better than the first 20 years.

1:10:30 Venerable Miao You

And it was the Master's aspiration to say that, you know, we should one day have an Abbess, or Abbot of the Nan Tien Temple with blue eyes. So maybe that's, we haven't seen it yet, but I do hold up hopes that one day that will happen, you know.

1:10:59 Venerable Miao You

And the only way to make that happen is to be more accommodating, is to be more welcoming and that we, as the propagation of Humanistic Buddhism, or the educators of Humanistic Buddhism should really practise the Buddhist values that we saw kind of like, you know, inspire, or aspire to.

1:11:37 Venerable Miao You

So, kindness, compassion, and giving people convenience, and giving people joy, that should be just practise all the time. Every moment of the day. Because you don't know who you are meeting, who has an impact, alright, with your teachings.

1:12:06 Venerable Miao You

Because we meet a lot of students, every day, when we go through excursions, and things like that. And these students come back again as an adult and they bring their students here. And saying that I came, like, 15 or 20 years ago, and on an excursion. And I remember, you know, how nice and friendly the Venerables are and now I'm back again, I'm bringing my students.

1:12:41 Venerable Miao You

In fact, one of the Premier's Office, one of his assistants or his secretary, said that she remembered coming to the Temple during a school excursion some 15 years ago. And she remembered the Temple with very happy, good feelings.

1:13:10 Venerable Miao You

And so, today, we're asking, you know, the Premier's Office to write us a nice letter to commemorate the 30 years, and so this is what she was going to write. So that's why our impact cannot be understated. And so, I do hope that, maybe in the next 20 years, we will have an Abbot with blue eyes.

1:13:42 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you. We look forward to that day. So, we understand that the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the founder, our founder, passed away last year. So, in memory of him,

throughout his life and his dedication, making Buddhism accessible to individuals from every walk of life, could you also recollect some of your encounters with him, and also, are there specific moments involving him that has left a lasting impact on you?

1:14:15 Venerable Miao You

Well, I remembered, after our ordination, or during one of the ordination, he, in his lesson, or during the lesson, he says that once you become monastic, you don't have a choice. So, what did he mean by that? He says you just have to touch your head that you're now monastic, right?

1:14:42 Venerable Miao You

So, if you're now monastic, so everything that you do should be all encompassing Buddhism, to encompass Buddhist: Buddhist values, Buddhist way of life, and Buddhism for everything. So, you should not say "no" to your boss, or to your Abbot or Abbess.

1:15:06 Venerable Miao You

So, in another words, you should be accepting of all conditions. So, I think this last an impact me, like, and then this was in the lesson, right? But my first encounter with Master Hsing Yun was not during ordination, because there were so many people, right?

1:15:26 Venerable Miao You

And then going to Fo Guang Shan in 2002, for the sramanera precepts, again, there was like, so many people. So, there was not, like, a one-to-one interaction with Master Hsing Yun, though I can see him, like, far away. I can actually feel his presence even, like, far away.

1:15:48 Venerable Miao You

And the only time that I have actual interaction with Master Hsing Yun was in his bedroom. We have an ensuite way, we sit and we can talk and all that. So, everybody was around. And I remember he asked me, like, what did you do in your last life, in your previous life?

1:16:07 Venerable Miao You

And I said, oh, well, I was a teacher. Because I was an early childhood teacher, right? And then he said, oh, good, you're a teacher, we will one day build a university, and then you can start, you can build a university and start, and be the principal.

1:16:25 Venerable Miao You

Oh. I said, I can't, I am a kindergarten teacher. And I am not a university. I said, I wouldn't know how to do that. And he said, well, when you do it, you will know. Okay, when you

do it, you will know. So, maybe he has the foresight, or the vision, alright, or the enlightenment to be able to see that coming into existence, coming into being.

1:17:05 Venerable Miao You

And, like, if you would say that time, when say, no, you, you're going to do this, and start the university, and whatever, you know, I wouldn't believe it myself, right? So even if you say, like, when I took the ordination vows, that you will one day become a monastic, and I wouldn't believe it myself, because not in my wildest dream, would I think that I'm going to be a Buddhist monk.

1:17:36 Venerable Miao You

And then not in my wildest dream that you will build university, or whatever, it's no. Because it's not me that build it, right? It's all the causes, the conditions that come together, that is able to make this happen.

1:17:57 Venerable Miao You

So, I didn't build it. It's I bring the conditions or the conditions exist. And I'm just coordinating these conditions to make it happen. Because I don't have the ability to do that, right? Because I'm not an architect.

1:18:15 Venerable Miao You

I'm not a contractor, a consultant or what, I just bring these people to do it. So, when he said that, you know, you will know when the time comes. So, that's why I think, you know, the greatest lesson he taught was, to never stop the conditions, to say no.

1:18:43 Venerable Miao You

See, when I say no, I stop the conditions, right? But because I say yes, well, you don't have a choice really, right? And then we all want to do what the late Master Hsing Yun aspire to. We feel that it is our responsibility to make it happen.

1:19:09 Venerable Miao You

And so, you have to believe, like in the conditions, and a belief that the Buddha would bring these conditions, would bring these people together, to make it, to bring it into fruition. So, when he said, he also said that be humble and rely on yourself.

1:19:34 Venerable Miao You

So, you know you have to rely on yourself. You cannot rely on other people to make it happen. So, that's why you got to be there to make it happen. Sometimes you said, oh, well, let's have a meeting and something.

1:19:47 Venerable Miao You

And then suddenly you disappear. You're not in a meeting. Right? So, if you're not in the meeting, that's one part of it is missing. Right? The conditions will come together, because you are the one that instigated.

1:20:04 Venerable Miao You

So, you have to be there. So, Master say, I am the Buddha, right? He said that you are the Buddha. So, I'm not the Buddha yet, but I have to believe that one day, I will become a Buddha. I too can become a Buddha.

1:20:24 Venerable Miao You

I have the potential to become a Buddha. So, I have to believe that I can do anything. Even though I can't, but I have to believe in it. Because when you have that belief, it will happen. So, the Buddha's teaching of saying, mind is everything.

1:20:44 Venerable Miao You

It is true. It is very, very true. And by us not denying ourselves of that opportunity, we are making things happen by accepting the responsibility, accepting those conditions, it will happen. It will happen.

1:21:02 Venerable Miao You

So, that's why, you know, life is always full of surprises and it's amazing. You'll be surprised it's amazing. So, I guess that's all I have to share.

1:21:18 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you very much. And that was very touching and is there anything else that you would like to add (Ven. Miao You: That's all) for today's interview? That's all?

1:21:30 Venerable Miao You

I think that's all. I have already shared. It's amazing. My journey is amazing.

1:21:39 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you very much, Venerable Miao You. Thank you! (Ven. Miao You's laugh).