

20240311_Interview Translation 002

Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Venerable Yi Lai

00:01 Venerable Jue Fang

This is Venerable Jue Fang interviewing Venerable Yi Lai on the 11th of March 2024. This recording is taking place at Kaohsiung Fo Guang Shan. The interview is being recorded for the State Library of New South Wales Oral History Collection and Nan Tien Temple's 30th Oral History Project. This is interview part two.

00:28 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Yi Lai. (Venerable Yi Lai: Yes.) My next question is about the fact that Venerable Master has established many temples worldwide. So, Venerable Master Hsing Yun has a concept that "temples are also schools". In the process of your serving as the Abbess, how do you implement this concept of Venerable Master Hsing Yun?

00:49 Venerable Yi Lai

Yes. One of the Venerable Master's messages to us was to integrate with local education. Fortunately, Australia is a multi-ethnic country, and it is a place where immigrants from all over the world live together. Therefore, Australia attaches great importance to the ethnic cultures of various countries.

01:11 Venerable Yi Lai

As I recall, at that time, schools invited us, saying, "Can you come to our schools and teach Buddhism to my students so they can learn about Buddhism?" We realised then that Australia is more open-minded than other countries. In other countries, there may be only one Bible, but in Australian local schools, they recognise multiple religions. So, decisively, we sent our Dharma teachers and quickly trained our Fo Guang people to teach Buddhism at various schools.

01:48 Venerable Yi Lai

From this starting point, from one school, five schools to nearly a hundred schools, from twenty students, thirty students to nearly ten thousand students, they all came to Chung Tian Temple, to our temple to take Buddhism-related courses. At that time, we met many Taiwanese and Chinese immigrants in Australia. One of their greatest concerns was maintaining their own language. In response, we dedicated weekends to implement our Venerable Master's vision of 'turning temples into schools', transforming our temple into an educational institution.

02:28 Venerable Yi Lai

During the holidays, we held the Chinese School. We started from the temple. We first used the garage. After the morning chanting, with the cars out, that place immediately became a classroom. We gave lessons there on weekends. This was very well received

by the local Chinese, especially the Taiwanese. There were a lot of new immigrants then who would send their children here once they had settled down. I felt very strongly that this was one of the best things, bringing the family to the temple and making the weekend a great success.

03:07 Venerable Yi Lai

On Sunday afternoons or mornings, families came for practices. The kids went to class, the mothers went to Dharma practices, and the fathers served as guardians to take care of our environment, or they chatted or read books in our library. Unintentionally, our Dharma practice day became a family day. The whole family came to the temple together. And we felt even more deeply that we should provide them with cultivation through immersion! Involving the family is an important aspect in the transmission of faith.

03:43 Venerable Yi Lai

At that time, every space in Chung Tian Temple, including the Five Contemplations Hall, all spaces except for the Buddha Hall, were turned into classrooms. They were joking about how they should register their children as soon as they were born. So, in addition to Chung Tian Temple serving as the main campus, we also rented rooms from local schools across the Gold Coast, spanning the northern, eastern, and southern regions, and opened five schools at the same time.

04:15 Venerable Yi Lai

We saw that not only Chinese people came to study Chinese, but also Australians and people from other countries. As long as they signed up, regardless of age, we would divide them according to their levels and teach and guide them slowly. So, we also see that learning Chinese is actually a way of spreading the Dharma, as it serves as the first step in bringing people into the temple. Therefore, its impact is truly significant. This reflects the guidance given to us by the Venerable Master: 'Turning the temple into a school'.

04:50 Venerable Jue Fang

Chinese schools at Chung Tian Temple in Queensland have been very successful. Are there any other Chinese schools in New South Wales, Melbourne or other locations? How effective are they?

05:04 Venerable Yi Lai

In Sydney, at our Fo Guang Shan Nan Tien Buddhist Temple Parramatta, we have a Chinese school. Likewise at the temples in Melbourne and Western Australia. I remember that at that time, almost all of the activities of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission of Taiwan were handled by us when they came to Australia. So I believe that the Chinese School not only preserves our Chinese culture but also allows children to learn the Chinese language. It provides causes and conditions for Westerners and

people from various countries to come together harmoniously. It also serves the function of promoting integration and peace within the local community.

05:46 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Yi Lai. This year marks the 30th Anniversary of Nan Tien Temple. Over the past three decades, BLIA and Nan Tien Institute have flourished. What are your expectations for the future of Nan Tien Temple and Fo Guang Shan in Australia?

06:07 Venerable Yi Lai

Well, time passes quickly. I believe we are very optimistic. Humanistic Buddhism is diverse; it is not just chanting sutras and reciting Buddha's name. At the same time, Australia is a very relaxed, accepting, and harmonious democratic country. So I believe that our Humanistic Buddhism in Australia, under the promotion of Nan Tien Temple, will definitely be able to bring peace and harmony and help to build a joyful and fulfilling land.

06:42 Venerable Yi Lai

Furthermore, with our Nan Tien Institute and various temples in different states, I am confident that we will fully realise the Venerable Master's four objectives and garner widespread acceptance among people in various regions. The Venerable Master's award of an honorary doctorate from Griffith University exemplifies why he deserved such recognition. It validates our Humanistic Buddhism and signifies acknowledgement from the local community. With these accomplishments in mind, we hold great hope for the future.

07:17 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Yi Lai. Thank you.