

20240313_Interview Translation 001

Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Venerable Tzu Hui

00:02 Venerable Jue Fang

This is Venerable Jue Fang interviewing Venerable Tzu Hui on the 13th of March, 2024. This recording is taking place at Fo Guang University, 160 Linwei Road, Jiaoxi township, Yilan county, Taiwan. The interview is being recorded for the State Library of New South Wales Oral History Collection and Nan Tien Temple's 30th Anniversary Oral History Project.

Auspicious Greetings, Venerable Tzu Hui. (Venerable Tzu Hui: Auspicious Greetings.) Thank you for accepting our interview. (Venerable Tzu Hui: You're welcome.) Venerable Tzu Hui, could you please introduce yourself? (Venerable Tzu Hui: About myself?) Yes.

01:22 Venerable Tzu Hui

My ordained name is Tzu Hui. However, as monastics, we usually have two or three names given by our Master. I have another name Yi Chung, and also Hsin Hsien. Hsin Hsien, the character "Hsin" is the name given under our Fo Guang Shan school, so strictly speaking, my name is Tzu Hui Hsin Hsien.

01:48 Venerable Jue Fang

Venerable Tzu Hui, Tzu Hui is the name given by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. May I ask what is your original name?

01:57 Venerable Tzu Hui

For my secular name, I'm surnamed Zhang. Zhang Youli is my secular name. But after being renounced, I've been using the name Tzu Hui.

02:13 Venerable Jue Fang

Venerable Tzu Hui, may I ask where you were born and in what year?

02:19 Venerable Tzu Hui

I was born in 1934 in Taipei. We're originally from Taipei. However, my father's job was transferred to Yilan, so when I was a kid, I moved from Taipei to Yilan and was raised in Yilan.

02:44 Venerable Jue Fang

May I ask Venerable Tzu Hui to briefly introduce your family background and the environment in which you grew up?

02:52 Venerable Tzu Hui

My family is simple, including my parents, myself, and a younger brother, with just four family members. And both of my parents had jobs. Although we are a family of four, we are positive because my family is filled with joy and happiness. Such a family with small size felt lively because of the joyful and warm atmosphere at home.

03:30 Venerable Jue Fang

So, does your family speak Taiwanese? or Chinese?

The language used in your family. (Venerable Tzu Hui: At home.) The language used at home among siblings.

03:41 Venerable Tzu Hui

The Japanese ruled Taiwan for 50 years, and my parents were one of the young couples in that environment. As for me, when I was born after they got married, although there were still some remnants of Japanese in use in Taiwan, due to World War II and the Japanese defeat, Taiwan was returned to China.

04:15 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, we had to learn to speak Chinese as kids. As for Yilan, it was a place originally belonging to the Fujian Province of China. So, generally, the Hokkien dialect of Fujian is commonly used, later known as Taiwanese. So, currently, the Taiwanese language spoken by Taiwanese people is essentially the same as that spoken in Xiamen and other areas in Fujian.

04:46 Venerable Jue Fang

Then, Venerable Tzu Hui, may I ask if your family believes in Buddhism? The family beliefs at home.

04:53 Venerable Tzu Hui

Oh, for the family belief, my father was a devout Buddhist. However, whether we are from mainland China or Taiwan, we call it an "incense offering". The practice of holding incense worship is probably deemed as believing in Buddhism or some folk beliefs, like this.

05:19 Venerable Jue Fang

Yes. You have mentioned that your parents put a lot of emphasis on your education. How did you grow up and develop during your childhood and the growing-up process in your youth?

05:31 Venerable Tzu Hui

Oh, both of my parents had jobs and were very busy. Supposedly, they did not have time to take care of the family and the children. But actually, my parents are not like that. They placed a high value on the family bond between parents and children. So, as long as they had days off, they would take us to hike or to play at the beachside. So, despite being a small family, we felt very happy.

06:09 Venerable Jue Fang

Then could you tell us about your education and how you grew up? How you were educated?

06:15 Venerable Tzu Hui

In our time, it should be said that it was during the 1950s when our Chinese government came to Taiwan as the Japanese left. So, under these circumstances, the education received by the people in Taiwan was chaotic.

06:44 Venerable Tzu Hui

I remember that I started to learn Chinese only when I was in the sixth grade of primary school. So, at school, teachers in class would speak either in Taiwanese or in Chinese. However, despite this, we still managed to complete primary school very regularly and then went on to junior and senior high school. I have attended both since my parents provided me with good education.

07:20 Venerable Jue Fang

Then may I ask, Venerable Tzu Hui, how did you develop an affinity with Venerable Master Hsing Yun?

07:27 Venerable Tzu Hui

Oh, speaking of this matter, I can say that my life can be divided into two parts. One is the family I grew up in, which originally believed in Buddhism. The other is what we call the "Spiritual Home", where I became ordained as a nun, that is, the place of Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

07:49 Venerable Tzu Hui

Because it was just after Taiwan was recovered at that time, many people in Taiwan studied Buddhism, but they did not understand the Dharma, just holding incense and worshipping. So many lay believers were eager to hear the Dharma. Therefore, at that time, many Venerables came from mainland China, including senior monastics and so on. Venerable Master Hsing Yun, our Master, also came during that period from Yangzhou, Jiangsu to Taiwan. He was only 23 years old when he came to Taiwan. Many lay people

in Taiwan wanted to study Buddhism and to find a Dharma Master to lecture on the Dharma, so they sent invitations to all the monks from mainland China. But they came to Yilan and gave a Dharma talk, usually only once.

08:59 Venerable Tzu Hui

The lay believers asked, could you stay and guide us? But those monks from the mainland refused to stay in Yilan. Because Yilan was quite remote and underdeveloped in the north-east of Taiwan. Also, although it was a short distance from Taipei to Yilan, you had to pass through caves and tunnels. Upon crossing the tunnels, everyone's face would be covered in soot because of the coal burning from the trains.

09:32 Venerable Tzu Hui

At that time, a group of believers, one of whom was my father, made great efforts to invite the Dharma teachers. Once they had invited the Venerable to come, they had to find audiences, so they compelled kids and family members to go and listen, just making up the numbers. Under these circumstances, I was forced by my father to go and listen, although I did not understand. It was just because my father said so, and that's how I went. By this opportunity, I encountered our Master, Venerable Master Hsing Yun.

10:16 Venerable Jue Fang

Yes. Venerable Tzu Hui, we know that Venerable Master Hsing Yun had dedicated his life to cultivating talents through education. As one of the outstanding leaders of the educational efforts of Fo Guang Shan, you also attach great importance to monastic education and spared no effort in social education. Your involvement can be seen in the Buddhist colleges, the Tsung Lin University, the kindergartens, the junior and senior high schools as well as the universities founded by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Could you please share how you have assisted Venerable Master Hsing Yun in nurturing monastic disciples, equipping them to shoulder the responsibility and the capability to build the Nan Tien Temple and serve society?

11:03 Venerable Tzu Hui

Engaging in educational work was quite accidental for me personally. It was not a deliberate pursuit of dreams or goals. Moreover, while following and working with Venerable Master Hsing Yun at Fo Guang Shan, I was not only involved in education. I was also engaged in culture, music, and various other activities. However, the longest and most consistent work I have done, without changing throughout my life, has been two things: education and translation.

11:51 Venerable Tzu Hui

Our founding Master, Venerable Master Hsing Yun, had an aspiration for education. It should be said that education was his lifelong commitment. I should say that since his time at the Buddhist institute as a teenager, he had this aspiration, this wish. He knew it could hardly be accomplished, yet he held onto this aspiration, never giving up throughout his life. Therefore, whenever there was an opportunity, he sought to establish education.

12:28 Venerable Tzu Hui

When he was invited to Yilan in the 1950s, even though there were no conditions available, apart from propagating the Dharma to benefit all beings, Venerable Master still wanted to carry out educational work. Therefore, he first established a kindergarten in Yilan, called Ci Ai Kindergarten. In addition, he also established a tutorial centre for young people to further their education, called Guang Hua Tutorial Centre.

13:06 Venerable Tzu Hui

To help these young people get into universities, he organised the tutorial class for free, known as the Guang Hua Tuition Centre. The renowned psychologist in Taiwan, Professor Zheng Shi-Yian, was a student of this tutorial class; the tutorial class was provided for free.

13:33 Venerable Tzu Hui

Venerable Master also established a kindergarten. Despite the challenging environment in Yilan, Master Hsing Yun believed that as long as he had the opportunity and a platform, he would act on his wishes and thus establish the kindergarten.

13:55 Venerable Tzu Hui

At that time, I was just a young member of this community, an office worker who attended activities in my spare time. Venerable Master Hsing Yun shared his vision with us about his aspiration of establishing a kindergarten. We were very interested as young people, although we did not understand early childhood education. So, he sent us to Taichung to receive training in early childhood education while he himself was building the kindergarten. In this way, when we returned, the Ci Ai Kindergarten was opened.

14:33 Venerable Tzu Hui

The Master's attitude towards running the kindergarten was not to say, "You are the professionals, so I'll leave you to it". He was not like that. He worked with us side by side. So, when we ran the kindergarten, he also observed how we taught the kids. Then he also joined us as well.

14:58 Venerable Tzu Hui

Let me give you an example. The kindergarteners were only three, four, five or six years old. Every morning, when the bus came to pick them up, almost every child would be crying and fussing, unwilling to come. Even when they were brought to the kindergarten, they would cry out for their mothers and want to go home, causing a fuss at the kindergarten. As a result, it was often that we found a lot of kids, but because of crying and fussing, they stopped coming to the kindergarten. Seeing this, Venerable Master realised that it couldn't go on like this.

15:35 Venerable Tzu Hui

Then, he taught us a method. He created a small zoo in the kindergarten. Inside the zoo, there were monkeys, rabbits and birds. But what about the birds? You can put the monkeys in a cage and put the rabbits in another cage, but what about the birds? Surprisingly, he suggested birds be placed in our teachers' office, with all the windows and doors closed, allowing the birds to fly in the office. So, all of our teachers worked in the office while the birds flew over our heads. There were birds such as the 'masked laughing thrush'. Anyway, we kindergarten teachers also found it quite fun.

16:24 Venerable Tzu Hui

When the kids cried or made a fuss, they would be brought to see the monkeys or go to see the birds, and they would stop crying; they would stop fussing. This is how Venerable Master joined us in early childhood education, and later, it truly helped retain many students. Among these, there was a monkey that was bought, very small, perhaps not even 30 centimetres tall, very cute. The person who sold us the monkey told us, this monkey, you must not give it water to drink. If you don't give it water, it will remain this small and cute. But if you give it water, it will grow. We remembered this and decided not to give it water.

17:12 Venerable Tzu Hui

Then, one day, Venerable Master found out about the situation and said, "How could you be so cruel? If it were you and I didn't give you water, could you survive? No, you must give it water". He was very compassionate. Well, after it drank the water, oh no, it really grew. It almost grew to a size that is slightly bigger than a newborn baby. With such an increase in size, it became very strong, broke out of the cage and ran out, becoming quite fierce.

17:44 Venerable Tzu Hui

Upon escaping, the monkey leapt onto the roof of a three-story building across the street, glaring down menacingly as if ready to attack. The teachers and I, as the principal, were at a loss on how to retrieve the monkey, so we sought Venerable Master's help.

18:05 Venerable Tzu Hui

What was Venerable Master doing? He was doing the Seven-day Retreat, chanting the Buddha's name and circling around the Buddha in the Buddha Hall. So, when he circled around to the door, I opened it and said, "Master, the monkey has escaped". He asked, "How could this happen?" Then he came out, wearing his red robe, and asked, "Where is it?"

18:31 Venerable Tzu Hui

I said, "Over there, in the building across the street". He came out, and across the street was a main road, with the three-story building on the other side, where the monkey was up there. Then, Venerable Master stood there and gently said to the monkey, "Get down and come here". The monkey descended and very obediently ran to Venerable Master's feet, sitting quietly there without moving.

18:56 Venerable Tzu Hui

Alright, we were relieved. What if it had bitten someone? So, this was how Venerable Master was involved in our kindergarten education, joining us in such a way. So, we young people ran this kindergarten happily. Therefore, within less than five years, we had over 500 children in our kindergarten. It was a huge change; one kindergarten couldn't hold them all after five years. So later, we rented another place to serve as a second branch in the south of Yilan.

19:37 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, as a result, the kindergarten became very famous in Yilan. This was how I started working in education with Venerable Master Hsing Yun. After running the kindergarten for 5 years, Venerable Master asked me to join a cultural organisation. I handed over the kindergarten to someone else. Then later, Venerable Master began to think that besides kindergarten, Sangha education was also important. So, he started establishing monastic education.

20:13 Venerable Jue Fang

Yes. The Nan Tien Temple has been in Australia for 30 years. It is celebrating its 30th Anniversary this year. All of our Venerables have received cultivation through the Sangha education at Fo Guang Shan. What kind of education is it?

20:28 Venerable Tzu Hui

For Venerable Master Hsing Yun, to establish Sangha education primarily requires a place. But Venerable Master, as a young monk in his twenties from mainland China, did not have a base. He needed connections, needed a venue. So later, in Kaohsiung, at the foot of the Shou Shan Park, the devotees helped build a Shou Shan Temple. When he

had Shou Shan Temple, Venerable Master thought, now I can do it, I have a place to proceed the education.

21:01 Venerable Tzu Hui

But the devotees expressed that, "Master, we invited you to come, only to lead us in our practice, to expound the sutras and the Dharma. To establish a Buddhist college is not that important". That's what the devotees thought, but not Venerable Master. Venerable Master insisted firmly that the future of Buddhism must be built on nurturing talents. Talents not only can work for Buddhism but also can elevate the quality of monastics. The reason that monastics are called 'teachers of humans and gods' is because they need to teach and guide sentient beings, so they must have good education and upbringing themselves. Only in this way could they propagate the Dharma and benefit sentient beings, particularly enhancing the standard of Buddhism. So, he insisted on an educational institution.

21:59 Venerable Tzu Hui

A temple like the Shou Shan Temple, which was built inside a large building, had insufficient space, but Venerable Master still went ahead with it. At the same time, because Sangha education was for young students, who lacked financial means, even studying at Buddhist colleges was opposed by families throughout society. Because they thought that being a monastic who only recited sutras and chanted the Buddha's name had no future, they strongly opposed it. Therefore, at that time, the Buddhist college was completely free of charge, with all expenses, including food, accommodation, and tuition fees covered. However, the devotees were not enthusiastic about supporting this initiative, as they preferred to listen to the Dharma talks. Despite these challenging circumstances and various conditions, Venerable Master was determined to establish a Buddhist college.

23:09 Venerable Tzu Hui

Of course, the first challenge he faced was funding. Later, in order to raise funds for the Buddhist college, Venerable Master, who had always been strongly against earning money through offering chanting and repentance services¹, even started offering these services. Moreover, for the sake of the Buddhist college, he offered what we call, in Buddhism, an "all-night recitation". This refers to the practice where, immediately after someone's passing, while they are still in the hospital morgue, sutras are recited throughout the night. For the overnight recitation, the offerings were doubled or even tripled. So, Venerable Master went to do this kind of service, often going out at midnight, reciting sutras in the hospital morgue until 6 o'clock in the morning and

¹ The Chanting Scriptures and Repentance Service, or Jingchan, originated as a Dharma gate in Buddhism to spread the Dharma and deliver sentient beings.

returning home when the sky was lit. He supported the operation of the Buddhist college by this means.

24:08 Venerable Tzu Hui

However, later when the Buddhist college was established in Shou Shan Temple, the students, under the leadership and guidance of Venerable Master, were young but disciplined and always upheld the Buddhist conduct. Consequently, the devotees were deeply moved and felt that Venerable Master's decision was indeed correct. Therefore, they began to strongly support the Buddhist college. Soon, initially with only about twenty students enrolled, the Buddhist college began to expand. As it expanded, the space in Shou Shan Temple became insufficient, so they had to find another place. As they searched for a location to establish the Buddhist college, they found the piece of land that is today's Fo Guang Shan.

25:01 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, when we came to Fo Guang Shan, initially, it wasn't to build a temple, but to establish a Buddhist college, to run a school. Moreover, the location of Fo Guang Shan was quite remote, with limited access to and from the city. There's only one bus each day. Venerable Master thought it was just right. As the area was sparsely populated, it allowed the students to study and allowed us to run the college with peace of mind.

25:33 Venerable Tzu Hui

Therefore, in Kaohsiung, the area that is today's Fo Guang Shan, a Buddhist college was established. Venerable Master was not the only one running Buddhist college in the Buddhist community; there were many others in mainland China and Taiwan as well. However, under Venerable Master's ideals, our college saw a continuous increase in students. At one point, there were over 700 students in the college. Why did the number increase?

26:16 Venerable Tzu Hui

It was because the requirements at the Buddhist college were very strict. Generally, Buddhist colleges tended to be more lenient with student leave and enrolment, but Venerable Master's requirements were very strict. At the time, we thought that with such strict requirements, would any students come to study? To our surprise, the number of students increased instead. So, when we asked those young people who came to study, "How could you possibly come here knowing there are such strict requirements?" They replied, "It's precisely because we heard that it was strict that we came". Therefore, under such circumstances, Venerable Master devoted himself wholeheartedly to the planning of the Sangha education.

26:58 Venerable Tzu Hui

As for me, when Venerable Master started to run the Buddhist college at Shou Shan Temple, there were some basic staff roles at the school. One was responsible for administrative affairs and paperwork, and the other was to take charge of the students. The one in charge of administrative affairs was my Dharma brother, Venerable Tzu Chuang. Venerable Master asked me to be in charge of the students.

27:22 Venerable Tzu Hui

However, at the time, I hadn't been ordained yet, and I didn't understand anything about the Buddhist college. I hadn't even attended one myself. So, how could I manage the students? Many students were monastics, and as a lay devotee, I felt unsure about how to manage monastics. So, I repeatedly told Venerable Master that I was not capable.

27:41 Venerable Tzu Hui

But Venerable Master insisted, saying, "You can do it once you start". As a result, I found the job very challenging at the very beginning. Some of the monastic students were excellent in their practice and ritual performances. However, as a layperson, those performances were difficult for me. But I am very grateful that those students listened to me. Later, I realised this was not a sustainable situation, I should ordain. So, later on, it was because of those students that I eventually decided to become a monastic.

28:16 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, from that time up to now, our Sangha education for monastics has reached its 60th year since its foundation by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Looking back on these 60 years, I believe Venerable Master's decision to start with education was absolutely correct. Education is the foundation for cultivating talent. When we bring young people into the Buddhist community, where do we place them? If you only tell a young person to recite sutras during the morning and the evening chanting and eat vegetarian food every day, is that enough? They must have something to contribute and a stage, a platform to showcase their capabilities. That's what the Buddhist college is for. Especially today, graduates from our Buddhist college can be found across all five continents, not just in Asia or the Americas, even in Africa. They are all graduates of our Buddhist college.

29:31 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, I see the function and efficacy of education in these graduates. Because these students have been educated, they know what they, as monastics, should do and what tasks they should undertake. They've received the education, so you can place them anywhere in the world, and you can rest assured that they know what to do; they know

their mission. You don't have to remind them; they will do it themselves. Therefore, all the temple activities of Fo Guang Shan branches worldwide are carried out by graduates of the Buddhist college. Even when you send these people overseas and tell them to rest and take a break, they would refuse. Everyone works very hard.

30:22 Venerable Tzu Hui

Venerable Master has once told everyone not to be so busy. In the temple, there is always one day a week on which we have a free session² for everyone to take a break. This has been said for decades, but no one has been willing to do it. They do not rest. Why? They said, "Master, we are here to serve the devotees. The devotees' needs can arise at any time. We cannot say I'm having a rest today, so I won't do it". So, it is available 24/7; even in the middle of the night, if a devotee needs help, they'd go. Everyone does it willingly and without complaint. Especially when assigned to different parts of the world, the situations can be completely different in some countries. Some were assigned to South America and South Africa and encountered robbery and violence. But not a single person cowered and said, "I'm quitting. I'm leaving". They continue to persevere without anyone dictating their work hours; they are always there when needed.

31:37 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, when I see all this, I recognise the value of education. Because those who have gone through the Sangha education understand clearly what they should be doing. Therefore, the success of education means that no management methods are needed; they manage themselves. So, I think when people often say that Venerable Master Hsing Yun was very resourceful and that Fo Guang Shan was very wealthy, so there were ways to do it. That's not correct. What should be said is that Venerable Master Hsing Yun is very wise; he understood that the development of Buddhism needs to start with education. This statement is absolutely correct regarding the Sangha education.

32:22 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you, Venerable Tzu Hui. So, for the past thirty years, the Venerables serving at Nan Tien Temple have all received Sangha education from Fo Guang Shan. Next, let us talk about the Nan Tien Institute. Venerable Master Hsing Yun has established several universities around the world, and the Nan Tien Institute carries forward his compassion and aspirations to flow the Dharma water eternally. As you served as the chairman of the Nan Tien Institute from 2011 to 2022, could you please talk about how you implemented Venerable Master Hsing Yun's belief in founding the Nan Tien Institute?

² In Chinese 放香. A regular day off at the temple.

33:02 Venerable Tzu Hui

After laying the foundation of Sangha education, the next step was to think about serving the society, the public and the country. That's why he thought of establishing universities. So far, we have five government-accredited universities worldwide. Two are in Taiwan, one in Los Angeles, USA, one in the Philippines, and there's Nan Tien Temple [Institute] in Australia. The idea of establishing universities, especially in Australia, stemmed from Venerable Master's enduring aspiration of cultivating high-level intellectuals for society and the country. He believes that besides their professional competence, moral education is deemed even more important.

34:02 Venerable Tzu Hui

We felt that Australia was a country with kind and friendly people. If we provide young people there not only with professional education but also with moral education to strengthen their character, we believe it would be beneficial. Moreover, given the Australian government's education policies, we were quite confident. So, Venerable Master felt it was a very good cause for us to establish an institute in Australia. What's more important was that we already had the Nan Tien Temple in Australia. With the temple, we not only have the necessary space and facilities but also the faith and support of many believers who share the same belief to back the school. With these conditions, Master Hsing Yun felt that founding an institute in Australia was very feasible.

35:13 Venerable Tzu Hui

So, he initially focused on building Nan Tien Temple, but even as the temple was being constructed, he was already contemplating the establishment of an institute. He would never wait until the Nan Tien Temple was completed to start considering the institute. He had the idea of establishing an institute right from the beginning. Hence, Nan Tien Institute stands out from all Fo Guang Shan University Consortium worldwide in Humanistic Buddhism.

35:38 Venerable Tzu Hui

We have observed that Humanistic Buddhism is well-suited to modern society and contemporary people, offering significant help in their lives and environment. By integrating the principles of Humanistic Buddhism into daily life and cultivating high-level intellectuals, we can provide a unique contribution to education and society.