

20241005_Interview Transcription 001

Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Francis Wong

00:01 Venerable Jue Fang

This is Venerable Jue Fang interviewing Francis Wong on the 5th of October 2024. This recording is taking place at Nan Tien Institute, 231 Nolan Street, Unanderra, New South Wales 2526. 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.

00:28 Venerable Jue Fang

Good morning, Francis.

00:31 Francis Wong

Good morning, Reverend Jue Fang.

00:32 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. Thank you so much for accepting our invitation for this interview.

00:37 Francis Wong

It is my honour to be part of the Oral History Project.

00:41 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah, thank you so much. So, could you please start by introducing yourself?

00:48 Francis Wong

My name is Francis Wong. I'm the Elder Advisor of BLIA Sydney. BLIA stands for Buddhist Light International Association. I was born in 1953 in a small village in China. I left China at the age of nine years old.

01:10 Francis Wong

I have two elder sisters, myself, and then I have one younger sister and one younger brother. My childhood, basically, spent in China. We don't have any TVs. We don't have any toys. At that time, my childhood was primarily with close to the nature.

01:39 Francis Wong

So, I did a lot of tree climbing, swimming in the ponds, catching fish, listening to the wind blowing through the bamboos. That was quite a, looking back, that was quite an enjoyable childhood.

01:58 Francis Wong

My teenagers was spent in Hong Kong. I completed my secondary school in Hong Kong. Then in 1975, I came here as a student to study. Then, I studied at the TAFE. I think it's a communications and electronic engineering certificate course.

02:29 Francis Wong

But because at that time I was here by myself, even though my sister and brother-in-law in Perth. So, I have to earn my living. So, I worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant almost six evening per week.

02:54 Francis Wong

And then I spent the other time doing a study. My university degree was from Charles Sturt University. I realised that I need to have a degree because our family, we didn't have anyone with a degree from the university.

03:14 Francis Wong

So, I was studying part-time. It's called a corresponding residential school. So, I spent, I think two days at the uni and then the rest studied at home. It took me six years to obtain a degree in Bachelor of Business and MIS.

03:37 Francis Wong

When I graduated, my wife and my mom went there with me to witness the graduation ceremony. Indeed, I was touching, but I think they were more touching than me. So, that was a brief introduction of myself.

03:57 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, were you a Buddhist since young?

04:01 Francis Wong

Our family, I actually follow my mum to temples to do the traditional praying. So, not quite a Buddhist, it's just a normal traditional Chinese praying stuff.

04:23 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, you mentioned that you came to Australia in 1975 to study at TAFE. What brought you to come to Australia to study? And how was Australia like when you first arrived?

04:36 Francis Wong

Oh, when I first arrived in Australia, on the plane, when I looked down on the plane through the window, I see, I saw this one-piece, one-piece red thing. I didn't realise that these were the rooftop of houses.

04:59 Francis Wong

My, my thinking, in my mind, Sydney is a big city, so they must have very tall buildings, very busy. But to my surprise, Sydney then was quiet, was peaceful, not many people. My initial thought was, should I stay here or should I go back to Hong Kong?

05:24 Francis Wong

So, but I...final, I stayed and I started my study. The impression was the people here, they are quite honest, they are eager to help people and they are very friendly.

05:44 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, since 1975 you came to study, but when did you start to become a Buddhist? And also, how did you got to know the Nan Tien Temple?

05:58 Francis Wong

Oh, in 1996, Nan Tien Temple had a tree planting event. So, myself and my wife, Margaret, we knew this news and then we came here to plant a tree. My initial impression of Nan Tien Temple was, jeez, this is a big Temple.

06:28 Francis Wong

It's quite, it's quite peaceful. The Venerables here, they are very helpful. And also, my second thought is, it is good to have a Temple here so that we have somewhere to go, to pray to the Buddha. Then I, I think I didn't become a Buddhist yet. But we love this place because it was quiet. We felt that Nan Tien Temple almost any time, welcome us to come here.

07:01 Venerable Jue Fang

So, that was your initial impression of the Temple, but what made you join BLIA in the year 2000? What motivated you to become a member of this community and finally took up these leadership roles?

07:18 Francis Wong

It is not quite a motivation as such. We were invited to join BLIA because I think we went to the Kogarah Temple. Initially, we joined a class called Meditations. I can, I can see that there were a lot of volunteers do the work. They cooked, they cooked the lunch. People preparing the event. Also, people preparing all this groundwork. So, I thought, ah,

why, my initial thinking is, why were these people doing volunteer work? What attracted them to do volunteer work?

08:03 Francis Wong

And then at one day, a lady came and asked us, do you want to join BLIA? And I said, yes, yes, we would like to help people, we would like to do some volunteer work. And then, we joined BLIA. And then, only after we joined BLIA that we found out more about these organisations.

08:25 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, what inspired you to take on the leadership roles because you were actually the President of BLIA Sydney for six years?

08:37 Francis Wong

Since I worked as a volunteer, then the guiding Venerable, Reverend Jian Kuan, said to me, and she said, "If you want to, if you want to lead and you want more people to pick up the volunteer work, you need to have a role, otherwise, you will just work as a volunteer; people may not listen to you eagerly." So, I said, "Yes, that's right." And then, she said, "Would you like to become a Vice President of South-One Subchapter's?"

09:13 Francis Wong

And I said, "All right, let me try." So, then I picked up this Vice President of the South-One Subchapter for three years, and then I become a President of South-One Subchapter's, from...I think, it's from 2004 to 2007.

09:40 Francis Wong

Because according to the guidelines, we can only do two terms of the President. So, from 2008 to 2013, I became the Executive Director of BLIA. And then after the elections, they elected me to become the President of BLIA's chapter.

10:10 Francis Wong

And then from then, I took up two terms and then retired as President from 2020, and then become an Elder Advisor.

10:24 Venerable Jue Fang

Could you share with us the more memorial episodes or the memorial experiences during your time as a President of BLIA or even a volunteer of BLIA?