

20241004_Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Venerable Jue Fang

Interviewee: Daniel Wu

00:02 Venerable Jue Fang

This is Venerable Jue Fang interviewing Daniel Wu on the 4th 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.

00:29 Venerable Jue Fang

Good morning, Daniel.

00:31 Daniel Wu

Good morning, Venerable.

00:32 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah, good morning. Thank you for accepting our interview. Could you please do a short introduction about yourself?

00:39 Daniel Wu

Sure. My name is Daniel Wu and I'm currently the president of BLIA¹ Sydney. I was born in Hong Kong and also grew up in Hong Kong. Our family moved here back in 1982, and mainly our spoken language at home is Cantonese.

01:01 Daniel Wu

The religion, I would say that my mother is more religious. She would be traditional, like Chinese, more cultural beliefs, which is perhaps on a yearly basis going to temples and praying for the family, for health and prosperity.

01:26 Daniel Wu

So, it's not strictly Buddhist. But of course, there's also a lot of Buddhist influence in that. You're going to the Guan Yin temple or you're going to the Buddha temple, etc. So, that's mainly the background that I myself grew up in.

01:46 Venerable Jue Fang

What about your siblings? What's the size of your family?

¹ 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>

01:51 Daniel Wu

Yep. So, there are three of us. I'm the eldest of a younger brother and sister.

01:59 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah, are they all in Hong Kong now or they have also migrated to Sydney?

02:04 Daniel Wu

Yes, we moved here back in the 80s. And yeah, the whole family's living in Sydney at the moment.

02:12 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, what about your experiences of your childhood or teenage years or even your studies in the university?

02:20 Daniel Wu

Yeah. So, I came here when I was in fifth class. So, I think this was probably the best time, because it gave me a couple of years to learn English. Even though in Hong Kong, I supposedly went to a Christian school.

02:39 Daniel Wu

And they did actually have a lot of focus on English as well. But of course, you know, knowing English and being able to converse and talk to people and speaking English is two different things. So, I was glad that, before I go into high school, I had a couple of years learning English.

03:00 Daniel Wu

And yeah, I guess from my perspective, like all Chinese families, you know, studying is very important. So, I think for my childhood, I was very focused in studies. And I did actually receive good grades at school.

03:20 Daniel Wu

And this, again, could be for a bit of pressure as well, because it's, you know, the expectation to continue doing well every year. That took, yeah, thinking back now, there was quite a lot of pressure on myself.

03:36 Daniel Wu

But yeah, I was pretty much, coming, like you know, trying to be first in class or one of the top people in class. In fact, I think from my high school, I was one of the tops. I don't remember. Maybe I was third or something or, or fourth out of about 150 people.

03:58 Daniel Wu

And of course, I then went to uni. I did a degree in Electrical Engineering. In fact, it's a double degree. So, I did Computer Science and Electrical Engineering. This was before the time that they actually had an official Computer Science or Computer Engineering course at the University of Sydney.

04:18 Daniel Wu

And at that time, it's called Information Systems. And I guess, I remember the chancellor at that time, you know, at our graduation, remembering that, oh, in fact, they haven't actually got formal approval of this degree.

04:34 Daniel Wu

And they were getting the paperwork done at the year of when we actually graduated, because it was such a new course. So, that was a good time. I think very, very busy, of course, studying. And again, yeah, like all Chinese family, you always try to do well. And that's what I mainly spent my time in during my childhood, yeah.

05:04 Venerable Jue Fang

Okay. So, you first arrived in Australia in 1982. So, could you tell us your first impression of Australia upon your arrival? What was it like?

05:15 Daniel Wu

Okay. Well definitely a lot less Chinese people. From our perspective, yeah, going to Chinatown on a weekly basis, that was one of the things to do. Initially, I think my mother didn't really drive and we had to take the bus. And I still remember the first time we tried to get, we lived in Mascot at that time.

05:40 Daniel Wu

And, you know, the trip from Mascot to Chinatown would be, like a 20 minutes' bus ride, maybe half an hour, but it took us probably over an hour because we got lost, and you try to find people who can help you.

05:59 Daniel Wu

And I remember that you look at people and you think, oh, this person could be Chinese, and you can speak, and they may be, like, other background. They may look so like Southeast Asian but they're not Chinese.

06:11 Daniel Wu

So, yeah, it is definitely very different. And having that cultural connection is actually very important for migrants. And I feel that is something that my parents are very, like, they value that connection.

06:27 Daniel Wu

And that's why every week, you know, they'll go to, it's almost like a routine, where you know, you go to a Chinese restaurant, you know, in Chinatown, you have your yum cha and then followed by, you know, buying fruit and veggies at Paddy's Market.

06:45 Daniel Wu

So, this is something that we sort of went through during our childhood and this is what we spent during the younger years.

06:56 Venerable Jue Fang

OK. We know that you first visited Nan Tien Vihara in Parramatta in 1991. (Daniel: Yes.) So, that was during the Amitabha Buddha's Dharma Service. So, is that your first time that you encountered with Fo Guang Shan?

07:15 Daniel Wu

Yes, it is.

07:17 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. So, could you share with us your initial affinities with Fo Guang Shan? How did you get to know the Nan Tien Vihara?

07:24 Daniel Wu

Yep. That's actually a quite interesting story in itself. I think, during the late 80s, there was a lot of immigration, Chinese immigration in Hong Kong and also Taiwan. And at that time, I think the conditions which we actually ended up at the temple was that, it was during the Christmas day, and it was originally meant to be, we're going out to a picnic with our relatives and friends. It was supposed to meet at Bicentennial Park and that was, like, the Bicentennial Park was open only recently around that time and we've never been, like, being in Mascot. And going to Parramatta road was like a long journey so we never venture out west all that much. But on that particular Christmas day, we decided, okay, because we invited by our relatives that they would be having a picnic, at the Bicentennial Park, so we head off on that section.

08:35 Daniel Wu

But unfortunately, we actually got lost. And then we sort of gave up, and of course, at that time, there's no google maps, so we were a little bit lost and then my mother at that time, I don't know how she found out the temple, she's, "oh I think out here in Parramatta there's a new temple". And she somehow got the address and then we sort of looked up in the map, so yeah that's not too far off and then we ended up yeah at the Cowper street, Parramatta Vihara. And this is why they were having the Amitabha Service because it's during the end of the year.

09:21 Daniel Wu

And yeah, we were quite late, I think. We got in there when they've already had the break and immediately the Venerable said, "have you eaten"? That was the first thing that we heard. And then we said, "No, we just arrived". And so, we sort of rushed to the back where they're basically doing the service. So, we sat down and ate. My mother and the Venerable, they just started to talk. And then we did stay behind in the afternoon session because the Amitabha Service went for the whole day at the time. In fact, if I remember correctly, they actually went for seven days. I think times are a little bit different now. So, we then joined in to the afternoon sessions, during that after, after lunch, so that was sort of like my introduction to a temple.

10:20 Daniel Wu

I think from, yeah, going back a little bit, I do remember watching the one of the cartoons, you know, the Japanese cartoon of the monk, Ikkyu (Venerable Jue Fang: Yep, Ikkyu), Ikkyu, the wisdom of the Ikkyu and the stories and that. So, Buddhism to me is a little bit, I never actually connected because, okay, my mother went to the Buddhist temples and the Guan Yin temple, but I never actually connected because in that cartoon, they actually talk a lot about some of the interesting and funny stories about how Master Ikkyu applies his wisdom to overcome challenges.

11:06 Daniel Wu

Right? And somehow, at the back of my mind, I think, okay, maybe Buddhism holds some sort of answer to be more wise and a person with wisdom. So, that's sort of in the back of my mind. And so, coming to that and, you know, doing the chanting and quite a long session of meditation, I think it would have been about half an hour because you go through one recitation of the sutra, and then you'll sit down, and you'll meditate for half an hour.

11:45 Daniel Wu

And I still remember that feeling is like, having probably not meditated before and how do you actually keep focus for so long? For half an hour, it feels like an eternity. But yeah,

so there was a lot of people; I think in the old temple, there would be maybe 100, 120 people, they're all in their robes. And yeah, I can still sort of remember the dedication of everyone. Yeah, it's quite inspiring, actually.

12:21 Venerable Jue Fang

So, that was how your journey with Fo Guang Shan, Nan Tien, started. (Daniel: Yes.) So, what happened after this?

12:30 Daniel Wu

Yes, I think it was sort of on and off, maybe during some significant events like Buddha's Birthday that, you know, we'll go back to the Parramatta Vihara. And at that time, it was still considered quite far away, because the journey would take an hour from Mascot, and my mother, who does drive us around and take us to different venues, for school activities, etc.

13:01 Daniel Wu

She's not a very confident driver, so she'd just venture within the places that she knew well. But, yeah, I think, I do recall, going to the Vihara for a couple of events like the Buddha's Birthday and also the Sangha Offering.

13:24 Daniel Wu

In fact, it's quite interesting that at that time, one of, sort of a family friend, was sort of like bumped into her at the Vihara. She was a Buddhist, and she was doing the offering at that time. I remember, she was all dressed up very nicely; and I was like, I've seen the auntie, you know, before, but I've never seen her in that dress.

13:54 Daniel Wu

So yeah, I do have a memory of that during that time. This was, of course, before the temple² was even built. And yeah, so that would be like a yearly event, going to the Vihara and seeing the people there.

14:13 Venerable Jue Fang

So, you continue to go to the Vihara with your mother? Was she very involved with the Vihara after that?

14:20 Daniel Wu

She was more involved, and I think she would go more often. Even now and then she would say, I'll go to the temple to do some praying or something like that. But she went

² Here, it refers to the Nan Tien Temple.

either by herself or, I think later there was another auntie that, they sort of like, also went, and so they sort of like, went together.

14:45 Daniel Wu

But as I said for myself, and also because of the language as well, I actually don't know much Mandarin. We did study Mandarin while I was in Hong Kong, but not having used it, yeah, it's not easy. So, it's mainly my mother.

15:04 Daniel Wu

And my mother is actually quite fluent in Mandarin because of, during her studies, she actually boarded with some Taiwanese people and she learned the language, etc. And even, it's quite surprising that some of the Shijie³, some of the people in the temple think that she was from Taiwan because her accent was more of Taiwanese.

15:28 Daniel Wu

But yeah, she would do more work for the temple. And I know that during, I don't remember which year, but there was a time, probably around 93, I would say, where they were setting up the Chinatown temple.

15:44 Daniel Wu

And they actually had a temporary location opposite the, you know, where the Chinatown temple was, and she was actually doing the reception, maybe once or twice a week during that time. Because of the Chinatown temple, and that's closer to Mascot, that she frequented the temple more. But yeah, so that's where the connection is. And yeah, she would drag us to the temple on a yearly basis, I would say, during that time.

16:28 Venerable Jue Fang

So, you attended the Official Opening of the Nan Tien Temple in 1995? (Daniel: Yes.) So, could you take us back to that day, what was it like and how involved were you or maybe your mum in the Official Opening?

16:46 Daniel Wu

Yep. So, my mother was taking a tour bus at that time. In fact, beforehand, there were actually a lot of meetings, as you could imagine, to organise such a big event. And I remember, at that time I had my license, I did drive her to Parramatta. And yeah, she was involved in quite a number of meetings, driving her to Parramatta Vihara. So, like after, I think it would have been like a six o'clock or seven o'clock start of the meeting and waiting for her.

³ Shi-jie (師姐) is Chinese for Dharma Sister.

17:20 Daniel Wu

And it feels like the meeting never finished because she was like, nine o'clock, ten o'clock, etc. So, it was quite a long time. And there was probably, if I remember, two or three occasions wait that happened before the actual event.

17:36 Daniel Wu

And my mother actually was tasked with taking a tour bus. And yeah, so on that day, we met at the Chinatown and we boarded the bus there with 50 or so people. And then, yeah, we came down here. The bus driver got lost because they didn't know the place.

18:03 Daniel Wu

In fact, they saw the Pagoda. And then they say, oh, the Pagoda is there. And then, but of course, you have to actually turn off before the Pagoda. This was before the signs are over there now. So, I remember they had to turn around, etc.

18:19 Daniel Wu

And yeah, there was quite a lot of people. I think we were one of the earlier buses that arrived. The bus stopped and people got off. But I remember there's a comment from one of the people say, oh, is this temple really finished?

18:40 Daniel Wu

Because apart from the buildings, of course, you don't see all the trees and plants, etc. There's nothing there except pebbles and rocks and so forth. So, they're very different. But as the day progressed, there was a lot of people and buses were queuing up.

19:03 Daniel Wu

Yeah, I think from Chief Abbess, she did say there was, like, a 100 buses or something like that. So yeah, at that time, I didn't know; I just followed a bus. And my mother was taking a group. So, she took the group up into the Main Shrine, trying to get there.

19:25 Daniel Wu

And then she realised that she forgot... until she was stopped by one of the people because supposedly who have name tags. And she said, oh, I left the name tags on the bus. So, she sent me through and say, well, okay, riding 50 people having to go back.

19:42 Daniel Wu

She's just saying that, oh, please go back and get the name tags from the bus, which I did. So, I went back down and got the name tags. But by the time I tried to reach back, I was already sort of stopped because there's just too many people.

20:03 Daniel Wu

And so, yeah, I'll say that during the Opening Ceremony, I was sort of stuck in the stairwell of the Tea House. I couldn't even get up the stairs, and all the people were blocking. And in fact, the only way I could persuade a person to let me part is say, okay, I'll leave my driver's license with you so that at least I can give these name tags to the people there.

20:30 Daniel Wu

And so, she agreed. So, I went back and yeah, so I did eventually pass the name tags back to the people. But I think even by that time, it was already too crowded. All the corridors were full of people. There was literally no room to move.

20:53 Daniel Wu

And there was a few, like, TVs on the courtyard. I think they were trying to tell people that they were broadcasting the Ceremony through the TV. But then I think at that time, they were just playing some videotape of some Dharma function that Venerable Master Hsing Yun was speaking and that was it.

21:20 Daniel Wu

So, that's sort of my memory of the Opening Ceremony. So yes, lots of people, very crowded. We didn't see much, in fact, I did look at some of the photos and said ah, okay, so that's what happened inside and around, but yeah, we were sort of like, as far as, just on the edge there.

21:48 Venerable Jue Fang

So, from being a visitor, being someone who came with your mother and until this year, we are celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Nan Tien Temple's Opening. So, 30 years has passed and you were actually the host at the BLIA Oceania Conference, which is also that falls on the 30th Anniversary. So, what are your thoughts? (Daniel Wu: Yes.) Being stuck in the stairways and now on stage hosting the Conference?

22:18 Daniel Wu

Yes, now, I think obviously it has been a very interesting journey and there's definitely a lot less people for the 30th compared to the original Opening. But personally, I think it's just very grateful that the temple actually existed, not just here in Wollongong but also around Sydney and it gave us a lot of opportunity, it gave me a lot of opportunity to learn more about Buddhism and through that process you understand, like, even, I mean, you can think that any event, obviously there will be some challenges, some difficulty, but in fact to actually host something like that, it takes a lot of effort, a lot of time. For every person you see on the stage, there's probably a hundred behind the scenes to support; that's very interesting.

23:33 Daniel Wu

And it's a way to unite people as well. So, from that, even though the number of people is less, but for the building, for the monastic, for the group, for BLIA to be here, I mean, you can say that our spirits are now supporting the temple. So, not necessarily a physical person to be here, but to be here and also, you know, receiving the Premier's Award and the Heritage Listing, just goes to show, just to support this temple, how many other people and their like-minded people, their spirits are actually invested in this place and if you think about it this way, it's actually quite interesting and beautiful experience to be able to be part of it.

24:39 Venerable Jue Fang

So, after the inauguration, how did you continue with the temple?

24:44 Daniel Wu

Yep. So, I think, I do it again, frequent the temple maybe once a year as well. My birthday is towards the end of the year, and we do want to come down to the temple to have the vegetarian meals because from my mother she said, because to celebrate your birthday is not always about celebrating your birthday but also remembering the hardship that your mother actually went through to give birth.

25:18 Daniel Wu

So, I always had that in my mind and I say, okay, maybe you'll be good to be vegetarian during that day. So, I'd always look forward to it because as I like, because during my studies etc., I was quite focused, so I don't really have a lot of free time.

25:36 Daniel Wu

So, but I do look forward to coming to the temple at least once a year, at the end of the year, to add a vegetarian meal. Actually this was before they had the cultural festival. Yeah, so there's a couple of times I do remember that they have a Dharma function at the Pagoda during the Christmas and New Year period. We're joining on that and personally, I find the chanting quite relaxing and soothing experience. So, even though I'm not fluent in chanting at that time, I would like to just participate and that's how, generate an interesting way for me to learn about the Dharma.

26:33 Venerable Jue Fang

So, when did you become more active in the temple or BLIA?

26:39 Daniel Wu

Yep. So, there was 2002. That was when my father passed away in January. In fact, it was just before the Buddha's Enlightenment Day around that time. And of course, like, when

you have a close person that passed away, there's always a question, where did people go when they pass away?

27:07 Daniel Wu

This question, I mean, is there such a thing as a heaven? And do people really go into hell? So, then I start to ask myself, like, we actually don't know much about what it is. I mean, because of my upbringing and going to Christian school, so I know, okay, there's a concept of a heaven and a hell.

27:34 Daniel Wu

And what about people who are not Christians, where do they go? So, this was what I started to ask. And it was quite fortunate, if you like, that we've moved to the north shore. So, I was in Chatswood at that time, and I do live very close to the Chatswood Temple.

27:56 Daniel Wu

Actually, my mother at that time was still so affiliated more with the Chinatown Temple. But because of the distance and all that, we did go to the Chatswood Temple for the weekly chanting after my father passed away for seven weeks.

28:17 Daniel Wu

And yeah, during that time, you know, it was good that there were a few youths there. And then I joined in. At that time, there was, I wouldn't say, maybe it's a study group of some description. But after the chanting, we helped to wash the dishes and what have you, and then we may stay behind for some of the temple's activities.

28:44 Daniel Wu

There was a study group, and I think there was a few times where they had a choir or something like that. So yeah, just slowly joining in that, and then it sort of like, made me more connected to the temple.

28:58 Daniel Wu

And it also helped because my mother is already at the temple. It's one of the more approved activities. I can imagine, yeah, if I will say that I'll go to somewhere else, she may not be, you know, so relaxed about it. But yeah, going to the temple or joining some activity, okay, yeah, you can go. That's fine. No issues.

29:29 Venerable Jue Fang

So, you joined the BLIA youth group at the Chatswood Temple?

29:33 Daniel Wu

Yeah, at that time, I don't know if it's officially a youth group, but it's actually, (Venerable Jue Fang: For the younger members), for the younger members, like Caroline Ong. (Venerable Jue Fang: Yeah, Caroline). And yeah, there was probably four or five of us, and we did have a study group as such, and we read the Master's books and have a discussion, etc.

29:58 Venerable Jue Fang

So, that was in the year (Daniel Wu: 2002.) 2002, and now it's 2024, so almost 20, 22 years. (Daniel Wu: Yes.) So, how did you eventually take up the leadership roles in BLIA Sydney?

30:15 Daniel Wu

Yes, it's a long journey as well, step-by-step, really. I started volunteering, just basically, doing the dining service, cleaning dishes, just basic volunteering. And a different opportunity comes along.

30:36 Daniel Wu

And because at that time, I also didn't really speak Mandarin. In fact, yeah, speak all hearing is, so I was very grateful for Kim, who did the translation English at the Chatswood Temple, so at least, you know, I can understand, etc.

30:54 Daniel Wu

Of course, the books are also translated, so I would have read the English versions. But yeah, in terms of the journey, it's really just to embrace at the opportunity and not just, and I never think of a role or position as less important.

31:17 Daniel Wu

Now thinking about it, you know, you can tie that with the Buddha's ideology of, you know, everything's equal. But of course, at that time, even for myself, I think that, okay, if I can do some volunteering, if I can help out, then I can do that.

31:34 Daniel Wu

So, it's really just, yeah, just going through that and it's a way to connect with people as well. So, you sort of value that. So yeah, it's from, yeah, that thinking anyway.

31:55 Venerable Jue Fang

So, I think for the past 20 odd years that you have been with BLIA, you actually quite an active participant, quite an active member. So, could you tell us some of the events or activities or projects that you are more involved with?

32:15 Daniel Wu

Okay, yep. Buddha's Birthday at Darling Harbour, I think that's probably one of the main ones that I got involved in pretty early.

32:28 Venerable Jue Fang

Could you tell us a bit about this Buddha's Birthday. When was the first time you started participating? And how has it evolved over time?

32:36 Daniel Wu

Yep, so my involvement was helping with the food stall for the Chatswood Temple. Before the event, obviously there's a lot of preparation. They'll be making their, like, rice dumplings, so you'll have to go to the temple to help out with that.

32:58 Daniel Wu

And just under the direction of everyone, just doing bits and pieces, to help with that. And with transportation, it's a big task. So yes, so that's more like a yearly event, and everyone will be involved in the temple.

33:24 Daniel Wu

So, everyone will do that a little bit to make the event a success. And then of course, I got involved with more of the organisation side as well. Just as I said, depends on the year, there's a few years that I looked after the actual money collection.

33:54 Daniel Wu

And that's also a big task people may not realise. Before people can just tap their cards, you know, you have to do the reconciliations. It was quite a lot of work after the event to make sure that's done.

34:11 Daniel Wu

And yeah, it was just good that I was given the opportunity to do that. Yeah, there was a bit of a joke, you know, we will be counting the money or doing the reconciliation up until 1 to 2am in the morning, because we try to bank everything the following day.

34:31 Daniel Wu

And I did mention to, like, Mary Ann, who was leading that section, she said, oh, this is quite late. I said, I know if I'm not here, then I'll be at Chatswood, you know, washing the pots and pans. And that was probably what they have to do as well.

34:48 Daniel Wu

Because you can imagine that on the Sunday afternoon, you will be seven or eight o'clock before everything gets transported. And then people will have to wash the dishes until the wee hours of the morning.

35:01 Daniel Wu

So, then there's a lot of work and you can see a lot of dedication from everyone to make that event happen. And this is something that I always value. Like every event that you see is not really one person, is truly the multitude that can actually make it happen.

35:22 Daniel Wu

And all of these are just volunteers. And in fact, a lot of them are not just volunteering their time, they also contribute in terms of money and finance to make things happen. So yeah, it's very good to be part of it.

35:37 Venerable Jue Fang

So, were there any special moments or significant moments or challenges that you experienced throughout these 30 years for the Buddha's Birthday?

35:50 Daniel Wu

Yeah, I mean, there's definitely challenges every year. There's always something in terms of organising such a large event. I can think of a couple of examples. Of course, you know, when the event first starts every year, you know, there may be issues with setting up.

36:18 Daniel Wu

There may be issues with in the power or water, etc. There has been a couple of years, you know, where at the start, the power went. So, it's like frantically trying to work with the staff to recover the power.

36:43 Daniel Wu

And in the midst of it, you know, everyone's trying to do their stuff as well. So, you can say that it could be a special moment to coordinate all that. But like everything else, because so many people are supporting it, then we get to resolve the issues and keep the show running, so to speak.

37:13 Venerable Jue Fang

So, would there any other special moments?

37:16 Daniel Wu

Well, another one may be, like, the weather. So, it is an outdoor event so there was one year where the weather wasn't the best and it was raining before, in fact it was raining on the Saturday and at that time we did have the Opening Ceremony on the Sunday.

37:41 Daniel Wu

So, on the Sunday morning that it was still drizzling a little bit. And one memory that I have, quite vividly, is that, that time, our Abbess Yi Lai, she was offering the incense and I can see the concentration on her face and her expression to offer the incense.

38:11 Daniel Wu

And in a way, I can sort of relate that, she's probably praying for good weather, for the Opening Ceremony, especially when also the guests were late, probably because of the weather as well. So, I can see that, from that little episode, through the contemplation and just through positive mindset, you can actually, in a slight way, can change things.

38:46 Daniel Wu

And I do recall that, we did have good weather for the next hour and an hour and a half for the Opening Ceremony to proceed and the rain stopped and yes the VIPs and the MP did arrive slightly late but they did eventually arrive.

39:05 Daniel Wu

I still remember that there was quite a number of people urging that we should bring the Opening Ceremony forward, just so that it doesn't rain because it was just looking ominous that it was going to pour out.

39:23 Daniel Wu

And the Abbess quite calmly said that, no, we did say that we start at ten o'clock, so we must wait at ten o'clock and we must wait for all the VIPs to arrive. We cannot start without the VIPs. And then, sure enough, yes, the Opening was delayed slightly, but they did turn up, and it was a successful and a good Opening Ceremony.

39:52 Venerable Jue Fang

From our records, I see that you are also part of the radio program of the Nan Tien Temple, and you have been involved for quite a long time. (Daniel Wu: Yep.) And at the same time, you have also been involved with a Humanistic Buddhism journal translation project. It was over a few years with the Nan Tien Institute as well. So, could you tell us, share with us your involvement in these programs? Because you actually graduated from Information Systems, and so, from the computer aspect, you're quite a technical guy, I

suppose. And from there, what makes you want to be involved in these radio programs and journal translations, etc.?

40:42 Daniel Wu

It's also a bit accidental; the opportunity arises. And the radio program maybe I'll speak about that first. So, that was a program that we ran for many, many years, it was over 10 years before I joined.

41:02 Daniel Wu

I joined probably, if I remember correctly, around 2006 or so, but before that, they were already doing that for a number of years. And the program was prepared for 2CR and it was a Cantonese program, predominantly the 2CR channel was for Cantonese, and they would be preparing the program for the half an hour program every week for 2CR, and they originally used the cassette tapes and I know that the volunteers before would record, maybe, a month or two months worth of these programs and then someone will have to take the tapes or the cassettes to the radio stations for broadcasting.

41:56 Daniel Wu

So, when I came along, I think originally, I guess the lady Mary Ann was saying that she wanted someone more, I guess younger, to be involved with the program and so I ticked that box. Recording and converting using digital formats, and we used MP3 files afterwards was sort of like an afterthought, so it was mainly just thought that more younger people can get involved with the program.

42:35 Daniel Wu

And because I spoke Cantonese, I was helping with that recording and then it was only because, you know, we were still recording using a very old tape deck machine, it is a professional piece of equipment but still it's a little bit dated even when I start to use it, there will be mics and all that kind of stuff and we'll record using the cassette. I remember the way they used to produce these was literally just using some sort of dubbing machine and try to transfer and add some music to it, etc.

43:18 Daniel Wu

So, when I listened to one of the programs, I can definitely do better with a digital format. So, that was how we started converting a digital format and then we had better, you know, you can have proper background music and cutting in, cutting out, fade in, fade out, all those things to make the program more professional at that time. And then we converted into the MP3 format so that we can just, we can't email it because of the file size but yeah, that we can... this was even before, like, shared folders and all that existed. If I remember

correctly, it will be shared off some sort of a FTP site that 2CR hosted themselves, and I would upload the files on a weekly basis, so that they can broadcast it on Friday afternoon.

44:13 Daniel Wu

So, that was a project that I was involved in for over three years. On a weekly basis, we prepare the program on a Wednesday evening and we'll be reading articles from the newspaper, the Merit Times and have a short discussion about what the article is about. And then, on the Thursday, I'll be doing the editing so that I can submit it for Friday.

44:48 Daniel Wu

So, that's like a three-year project. We sort of stopped mainly because I then took on the Sub-Chapter Presidency and my time was a bit limited after that. Also for other reasons then it didn't, it paused for maybe a couple of years.

45:11 Daniel Wu

In fact, no, it would have been paused by four years because that was the length of my presidency at that time. And then after that, Mary Ann asked, do you think that we can start this again? We had the conditions, and Venerable Ru Yi at that time, who was the superintendent of the Chatswood Temple, she said, oh yeah.

45:33 Daniel Wu

And I was part of the Chatswood Temple. She said, oh yeah, we can give this a go. So, we then expanded the format to also include Mandarin, as well as both Cantonese and Mandarin. It's the same program, but in two different languages, so to speak, and we have more people involved as well for the Mandarin program.

45:57 Daniel Wu

So, the team expanded during that time for another couple of years. With a lot of these projects, it's really based on the time or the availability of volunteers. So, thinking back now, it's actually quite fortunate that I have other people, like-minded people, who are willing to participate and also to take these things forward because it's certainly not a one-person job. I mean, you have to do the research in the beginning, which Mary Ann did a lot of the things. She would read the Merit Time and figure out what articles are good, or she'll pick out a book that may be appropriate, etc. So, there's background researching, then you have to do the recording, and then of course, you have to edit. Some stuff you can do with a single person, but by and large you do have to have a team of people.

46:57 Daniel Wu

So, anything that you do see in the temple that exists and continues to run for multiple years, that's definitely the efforts of everyone associated with the temple, before something consistent can happen.

47:17 Daniel Wu

And of course, our monastics here in the temple is creating the conditions and the linkage between everyone. So, we should be all very grateful as well.

47:29 Venerable Jue Fang

Yeah. What about the journal translation project? How are you involved in that and what is it all about?

47:35 Daniel Wu

Yep, so I think the first issue, if I remember correctly, was around 2017 or something like that. So again, I was doing some translations for temple newsletters every now and then, mainly for the Chatswood Temple. Because Chatswood's demographics, even though it's predominantly Chinese, there are actually quite a number of English-speaking people who frequent the temple.

48:06 Daniel Wu

And also, there's Indonesians and Malaysians who are Chinese heritage, but they don't have the Chinese language. So, translating newsletters and articles into English is quite important. So, I was keeping up with that.

48:29 Daniel Wu

Again, newsletters, you may have a few a year and I would be helping with the translations there. And the opportunity came up at 2017 where, at that time, they were saying that, a lot of the journal articles, academic journal articles, are only written in Chinese because of the affiliation of the Nan Tien Institute with the Fo Guang Shan Temple.

49:00 Daniel Wu

And the Nan Tien Institute being an Australian education institution, our official language is in English, and therefore, we need to translate these articles. And I think, if I remember correctly, Venerable You Wang is the people who got up in one of our meetings and spoke about the project.

49:23 Daniel Wu

And yeah, back in Parramatta, yeah. So, I think I did put my hand up or somehow, a few of us put our hands up, yeah, we can, if you need any help, please let us know and that's

how we started. I think there was probably 30 or 40 people initially who started and I know a number of them are also overseas, not just Australia, they are from Singapore, Malaysia, the US.

49:58 Daniel Wu

In fact, up till recently, I mean, there was a couple of people in the US which continue with that translation. I mean, this is a big group and it's also interesting how... the article sometimes is quite long, I mean, they're academic papers, which you can think of as, like, 10,000 words plus for academic paper. So, to translate that, you know, with one person, of course it's gonna take a very long time, but the concept of breaking it up into different sections and getting everyone involved. Of course, the editor is a crucial person to make the article sound consistent throughout. Yeah, I think, again, this is coming back to the concept of anything, any project that you see, it takes a lot of time and effort and a lot of people. But the more important thing is to harmonise the whole thing.

51:09 Daniel Wu

Like, in your translation, you can have 20 people involved, but then, to them, so like, change that or transform that into an article that looks like it's written by one person. I think that's quite interesting. And if you think about it a little bit, it's also quite a beautiful experience to be involved.

51:35 Venerable Jue Fang

So, we come back to the question about you have been with the temple since its establishment. So, reflecting on the past 30 years, how have you observed that the temple or maybe even BLIA has transformed and evolved? Because this would also be a... because you are the president at this time, at the 30th Anniversary, you have experienced the past, how would you bring BLIA into the future?

52:15 Daniel Wu

That's a very good question, very interesting question. I will say that the first 30 years is about building. Like a place for people to come. And you can see that we have massive projects in terms of building the temple, establishing the temples around Sydney and of course the institute and the bridge.

52:44 Daniel Wu

So, these are multi-million dollar projects that everyone have contributed in to get us to this point. So, it's almost like, coming up to the mountain and then, I think the next step is really how we can effectively utilise the resource.

53:06 Daniel Wu

And as I said earlier, it's about engaging with as many people as we can. Having the building is, for us, now more symbolic that it is a place as a venue for us to congregate and to meet in person.

53:27 Daniel Wu

But moving forward and especially with technology is really about ensuring that the teaching of the Buddha, the Dharma is spread to the general community. In fact, I'm sure that a lot of the discussions and especially around ethical or ethics and the general being good etc. is consistent with the Buddhist teaching. And irrespective of you labelling it, this is the Buddhist teaching, it's just the basic values of humanity. And I think this is a part that we should play as a bridge.

54:20 Daniel Wu

We may be identified as a Buddhist group, but moving forward is really about taking these values and applying it into our daily life. It's not about your spiritual beliefs or your normal practice, it's combined that.

54:41 Daniel Wu

And that's the essence of Humanistic Buddhism, if you want to put a label on it. But I think it is about the basic values of humanity and with all the conflicts that's happening in the world right now, this is something that we need to be constantly reminding ourselves on.

55:01 Daniel Wu

And if everyone can do that, then we can influence government, we can influence people. And hopefully, people will take a direction away from conflict and try to solve problems in a more harmonious way.

55:19 Daniel Wu

So, this is where I see the temple and the BLIA play a crucial part in advocating or propagating these ideals or these beliefs. And yeah, I think we are doing a good job from all the sort of connections or discussions I have with our local MPs.

55:51 Daniel Wu

They've been very positive about our organisation. But for us, I think the trick is how do we continue this in a way that keeps it interesting so that people will join us. And we also need an image of branding change ourselves as well, not to be our view as a very conservative movement or that we're worshipping Gods and we're there or superstitious people.

56:32 Daniel Wu

And yeah, I think a lot of those stereotypes, if you like, needs to be changed. And Fo Guang Shan is definitely one of the temples that has contributed these and we should rely on that way and make sure that message is propagated, so that everyone understands and they don't think of us as just a group of people who are Chinese or Southeast Asian and that they're different from us. But because we are actually already practising what they are believing, perhaps not with the same label.

57:12 Venerable Jue Fang

Okay.

57:23 Venerable Jue Fang

So, in memory of the Venerable Master, you know that our founder has passed away last year. From your interview, from what you have said, I see that he has actually influenced you in quite some parts of your lives. So, reflecting on your encounters with Venerable Master, could you share with us, were there moments that has really changed or maybe touched you with him? And how has that evolved as well?

57:59 Daniel Wu

I think for myself, although I have met the Master on number of occasions but it's not really a personal audience as such. It was during some, you know, events. In fact, you know, the first time I did, so I see him in person, so close, would be in 93, I think, where he was giving a Dharma talk at the Town Hall in Sydney.

58:30 Daniel Wu

So, I did join that event. I don't remember yet, there was also quite a lot of people who joined in. At that Dharma talk, he did let the assembly taking the three refuge, and not sure if there was precepts, but definitely the three refuge where he explained the triple gem and what it means to take the refuge in the triple gem.

59:05 Daniel Wu

And for me, I think that was a turning point as well, because I do mention that even though I sort of come from this family where Buddhism was there, but to me, like, how it was connected, it was all missing.

59:19 Daniel Wu

And it was good for him to explain that and what it means to be a Buddhist. So, I think if I recall, even though I was only in the audience, probably sitting up at the back somewhere, you know, 20 miles back, I was relatively close to him.

59:42 Daniel Wu

And then, of course, when he did come to Nan Tien Temple, there's a few times where he'll walk past or during his later stage, you know, he'll come by in his wheelchair with his attendants.

1:00:02 Daniel Wu

I do remember one incident, or one time, this was 2006, where we were stationed at the airport for the Director's Conference, where it was hosted in Nan Tien Temple, and Venerable Master came here on that occasion.

1:00:28 Daniel Wu

And yeah, we were literally camped out at the airport for about three days or whatever it was prior to events, because there were hundreds of people coming from all over the world and flights were delayed, and especially the ones coming from South America, etc.

1:00:48 Daniel Wu

And we were just seeing there, I still remember, just keeping to ourselves, having a bit of coffee, having a chat. And then, there comes the Venerable Master Hsing Yun, with only a couple of the more senior Venerables. Because as I understand, he didn't want people to go and walk on him and make a big fuss.

1:01:10 Daniel Wu

So, we all got up, and we all, it's like, I think there were probably three of us only when we went up, and I remember the first thing he, I can see that, he was probably tired from the journey, but the first thing he did say to us is, he said in Chinese, "Xin Ku Ni Men" (辛苦你們). And I thought that was quite touching because, I mean, at that time, he would be in his, close to 80 right, his health was not the best, etc.

1:01:40 Daniel Wu

So, I think that he would have probably got a more tiring journey, but he first would be saying that, oh, yeah, thank you for coming, and he was very considering. He was that generous, like, you can see in his eyes that, you can just understand why he can touch so many people and he can lead such a big organisation.

1:02:08 Daniel Wu

So, that was one memory that I do remember. But otherwise, I'll say that my connection with the Grand Master was mainly from his books. And just how he explained, how the Dharma relates to our everyday activities.

1:02:34 Daniel Wu

That's just something that, I think is very important because if you join any Buddhist discussion, they'll delve very deep into the sutras and it became almost academic and yeah, to be honest, sometimes a bit boring. But to make it more lively and actually make it more applicable.

1:03:01 Daniel Wu

I think that is something that, yeah, all of us should be thankful. Because, I mean, subsequently, there's other eminent masters who's doing the same now, but I think he actually was probably one of the first people who can transform the Dharma into something that, I guess, relates more to modern society and how that can be applied and for that, we should all be very thankful.

1:03:34 Venerable Jue Fang

So, last year the BLIA Sydney Chapter registered a star under the name of the Venerable Master. So, could you tell us more about it? Because you were the one who actually did this.

1:03:47 Daniel Wu

Yes, that was, I can sort of explain how it came about. So, we're preparing for the General Conference that all our members, the BLA members, every second year we do go back to Taiwan for this general assembly.

1:04:14 Daniel Wu

And the question came up as to, you know, what kind of gift, we can give to a temple during that time. And this was a question that was circulating to us probably a couple of months before. There was always like, let's think about it. There was still a question mark at the end. There was no conclusion.

1:04:33 Daniel Wu

But just before, probably two or three weeks before the actual event in September, it was the Moon Festival. And one night where I was driving back from work, it was quite like, along that work and it was already dark. As I was driving, I can see the bright moon. And next to the bright moon there was, like, stars. It was something like, out of a postcard actually, even though I was just driving, you know, on some Sydney street. And that was when this idea of saying, okay, what kind of gift we can actually give to the Grand Master. And the idea of, you know, star, and this is part of his name as well, that I thought, okay, maybe it will be a good way to remember him. So, then I looked up, okay, how do we go about registering star?

1:05:32 Daniel Wu

Actually, the process is not that complicated, to be honest. But the main thing is that, we have a way to remember the Grand Master and hopefully, it will inspire people. And when we can choose which star we can actually register, I did think about the Southern Cross and the relevance for the Grand Master and how he came to Australia, Wollongong, to build this temple.

1:06:07 Daniel Wu

And the Southern Cross, of course, is a significant constellation and relates to the Australian history. So, I thought that it may be very fitting to register star in that constellation for the Grand Master because originally, the Western settlers found this place because of the Southern Cross.

1:06:32 Daniel Wu

And I'll say that it will be fitting to have a star in that constellation in the same way that Venerable Master had brought Dharma here and given us direction. So, it's with that sort of thinking that we registered a star.

1:06:50 Daniel Wu

And I understand that, that was quite well received. In fact, I was very surprised that there was so much news about it. I just thought that it was just, if you say, it's a good condition for everything to come along to have this and we should use this as a way, as an inspiration in the same way that our Master has given us all inspirations to practice.

1:07:20 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you so much for sharing with us your 30 odd years of your life journey with the temple, with BLIA and how you have benefited from the Dharma and now you're on a path that is continuing to spread this benefit to the society.

1:07:41 Venerable Jue Fang

So, we've come to the, almost the end of today's interview, is there anything that you would like to add?

1:07:51 Daniel Wu

I guess one thing to think about is, it relates to, like, what is the relevance of the temple and how we can propagate the Dharma? I think the youth and our connection with the youth is an important part and this is something that I think we all have to think about it as well.

1:08:23 Daniel Wu

There're different programs that we've started, we've done a lot of work with the local scouts and we've got now the BLIA scouts. I think moving forward is how we engage with our youth to make the practice of Buddhism more relevant for them as well.

1:08:44 Daniel Wu

It's all about relevance and this is also part of Humanistic Buddhism. It has to be relevant; it has to be useful for someone to take it on. So, I think, if you can ask me what our challenges are, what our direction will be, is to connect with our youth.

1:09:07 Daniel Wu

I think language is a potential issue and I think we should get more people to, especially with English-speaking backgrounds, to be involved. Without the language then nothing else flows, but having the right language then people can then appreciate the culture. Because it is very rich, the Chinese culture, especially with the Buddhism.

1:09:38 Daniel Wu

We have literally thousands of years of history that perhaps, because of the last couple hundred years where colonisation and everything, the focus may be more on Christian faith, but I think maybe for the next century or next two centuries, the Eastern philosophy and Buddhism can, you know, maybe create a balance and the world should be better for it.

1:10:13 Daniel Wu

Because I think we're the only religion that we promote non-violence and this is something that we need more of to make sure that we contain all the conflicts, make sure people live harmoniously, otherwise when things escalate then even though you may be on the other side of the world, we're all connected. So, we should be more diligent and not to be complacent, thinking that these conflicts are on the other side of the world. We all can do our little bit and wherever there's opportunity, we should advocate, we should connect with people and spread the message.

1:11:04 Venerable Jue Fang

Thank you very much. Thank you.

1:11:05 Daniel Wu

Thank you.