

The Bodhi Stand Presents

by *Bhikshuni Heng Ch'ih*

UPASIKA KUO TS'UNG DINWIDDIE

Since Kuo Ts'ung's father had been a minister for eighteen years when she came along, she grew up in a religious Christian environment. For many years she went to church on Sunday and was active in youth group meetings and events. She comments:

"To me, the ultimate goal in life was the search for the 'real' truth, no matter what it was, I wanted to find it. I read the Bible daily and prayed and for a long time I wanted to be a missionary."

Kuo Ts'ung attended Whitworth College and the University of Washington, graduating with a B.A. in English and Psychology. During her college days she lost the close connection with religion and tumbled about directionless in the sea of suffering. That suffering included not only what she brought upon herself, but what was happening to those around her:



"I saw my father suffer as he got older and became sick and lonely. I saw my friends suffer in confusing relationships where everything was upside down--they did what they didn't want to do and wanted to harm themselves because others had harmed them. What logic was there in this? I also felt frustration and confusion especially in not being able to change when I realized my own faults and mistakes."

Then Kuo Ts'ung met a friend who asked her what she thought of life. She replied that she thought it was empty and that all things were nothing! Her friend, who had been a disciple of the Venerable Abbot Hua for six or seven years, then told her a little about the principles found in Buddhism. At first she was very skeptical.

Conditions ripened and Kuo Ts'ung and her friend, Kuo Tsun, went to the Buddha Root Farm Amitabha Session. She recollects that event:

"This was my first experience with bowing, reciting, and sitting. I kept trying, but after three days, I couldn't take it any longer. And yet, leaving was not at all easy, either. I waited until I thought the Abbot had left the office to go up to the pavilion to lecture, and then I took an offering to the office. But who should I encounter sitting quietly in the yard but the Abbot!

He compassionately took the time to talk with me, asking me many questions which were very pertinent to my life. And he encouraged me to stay."

In 1979, Kuo Ts'ung and her husband, Kuo Tsun, came to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas to live. As she dwelt in the atmosphere of the Bodhimanda and perceived the continual teaching and transforming by means of the simple but fundamental principles of "No fighting, no greed, no seeking, no selfishness, and no grabbing for self-benefit," her initial skepticism dissolved and an acceptance of what a great individual the Abbot is and how lucky she is to be around him took strong root. It was then that she took refuge.

Kuo Ts'ung studies Chinese at Dharma Realm Buddhist University, helps with the Buddhist Text Translation Society publication work, and teaches at Instilling Virtue and Cultivating Virtue Schools. As to her fundamental goal in life, she says this:

"Buddhism is such a boundless vehicle for the search for truth. I am very fortunate to have this opportunity to live at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and cultivate the Way. The Abbot continually says to 'Try your best,' and I hope I can do just that."