

# *The Bodhi Stand*



*Upasika Men Yi-ping*

Men Yi-ping (門翼屏) was born in Twin cities County (near Harbin), Heilungjiang Province, Manchuria, in 1914. Her mother passed away when she was thirteen, and she served her father and stepmother with filial conduct. At nineteen, she joined the lecture training program given at the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way (道德會) in her county.

The Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way was founded by the child prodigy, Jyang Syi Jang (江希張), in 1928 as a channel to propagate traditional ethics, such as humaneness, righteousness, propriety, and filiality (reverence for parents), in an attempt to uplift the declining moral standards in China at the time. The Society was founded on these principles:

Remolding of society, creation of a great commonwealth, promotion of world progress, and benefit to all humankind.

It also took the following Four Vows as its main tenets:

- 1) to establish a moral intent for the sake of all who abide in heaven and on earth;
- 2) to shape destinies for the sake of all people;
- 3) to propagate the teachings for the sake of all past sages;
- 4) to establish peace for the sake of all countries.

A threefold plan was adopted to realize these aims:

- 1) help people open their wisdom;
- 2) assist people in becoming self-sufficient;
- 3) aid people in establishing their virtue.

The spiritual leader and guiding force in the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way was the Elder Mr. Wang Feng-yi (王鳳儀), more often known as "Good Man Wang" (王善人) to the tens of thousands who came to study with him. A native of Re He Province (north of Beijing), Good Man Wang was an illiterate farmer. Yet he was able to perfect the path of filiality and fraternity, and influence thousands of others to walk the same path.

Due to his utmost sincerity, Mr. Wang had a profound awakening when he was thirty-five. After his father's death, he observed the traditional Confucian practice of mourning and lived by his parents' graves for three years (1902-1904) from age thirty-nine to age forty-one. During those years of deep reflection, Mr. Wang realized that the major reason for the degeneration of society was the fact that women in China had no formal education in how to develop and embody the lofty moral virtues of women. In order to change the declining social situation, women first needed to be taught the proper way to behave in each of the various roles they would assume during their lives.

At age forty-five (1908), Mr. Wang renounced his family's wealth and began establishing free schools for women. In 1929, having already established over six hundred free schools throughout the three provinces of Manchuria, he was invited by Mr. Jyang to participate in the founding of the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way, with its headquarters in Beijing. Mr. Wang was appointed Head of the Training Program for Lecturers. From then until the time of his death, in 1937 (age 74), over one thousand two hundred branch Societies were set up throughout the country. Each branch Society in turn established an elementary school, a high school, and an adult school. In addition, many branches ran factories to promote economic self-sufficiency. The movement became extremely popular and exerted a profoundly positive effect on the moral standard in society at that time, especially in Northern China.

Madam Men Yi-ping entered the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way in its golden years. At age nineteen (1933), she enrolled in the first-level Training Program. After an intensive forty-day training course, students from the Program were placed in teams, usually consisting of seven persons, which were dispatched to the various villages, towns, cities, and provinces on a rotating lecture circuit. They had close contact with people in all stations of life, ranging from the gentry and landlords to the merchants and farmers. Gifted with an uncanny intuitive understanding of human nature, upright views, and unimpeded eloquence, Madam Men quickly received recognition throughout the country as a teacher for the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way. In her early twenties, she was already hailed as "one of the four great lecturers of the entire country." When she was twenty, Men Yi-ping and her team came to the town of La Lin to establish a branch society there. The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua, a native of that town and a youth of sixteen at the time, heard her talk on several occasions. He was impressed by her eloquence, dynamic presentation, and proper views. At that time, the two of them were not introduced, and it was not until half a century later that they formally met.

After graduating from the intensive training program, she traveled even more extensively throughout northern China. In 1934, she settled at the Chang Chwun Branch of the Society, drew near to the elder Mr. Wang, and received personal instruction from this remarkable man. After Mr. Wang passed away in 1937, Madam Men moved to Ji Lin Province and became the supervisor of a training program there. In the following two years, she was instrumental in establishing various branch-societies throughout Manchuria. When her father passed away, in 1944, Men Yi-ping went back to her home near Harbin for the funeral. Thereafter, she stayed in Harbin, and in 1946 entered a training program in gynecology and obstetrics at the Harbin Red Cross Hospital, where she served until 1972.

In 1948, the Society for Virtue in Accord with the Way was terminated by the government. During the subsequent forty years, Madam Men has remained quiet and shunned the limelight. Although she has never had the chance to fully realize her hopes, she has been content during the last several decades to

enhance her own learning by delving deeper into the teachings of the sages and exemplifying them in her everyday life.

In the summer of 1987, a Water, Land, and Air Dharma Assembly for Liberating all Departed Spirits and a Conference for United World Religions were held at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The Venerable Master invited Madam Men to take part in the celebrations. Pleasantly surprised, she accepted the invitation and came to America. Ever since her arrival in America in mid-July, she has been filling speaking engagements in San Francisco, Berkeley, San Jose, and Los Angeles, and she is scheduled for Seattle, Vancouver, and Calgary. She has been delighting Western and Eastern audiences with her candor, wit, and profound insight.

The main topics she covers in her talks are: the Three Realms, the Five Elements, the Four Great Domains, proper role-models for modern women, women's ethics, and family dynamics. Another major concern of hers is the urgent need for all religions to join in a united pursuit of world peace.