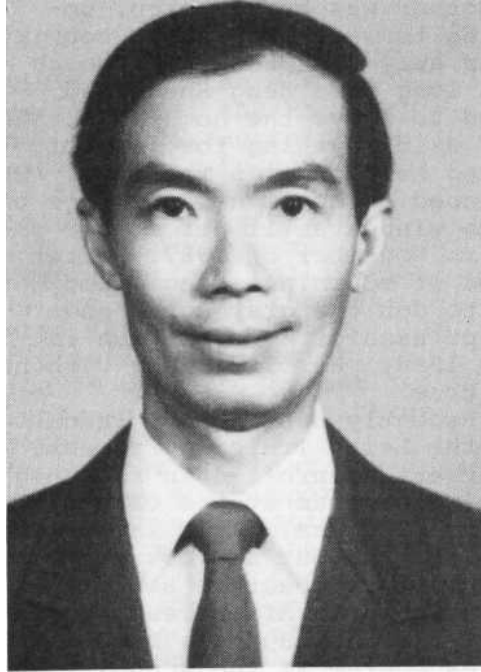


The Bodhi Stand



Upasaka Ong Sit-Tui (Gwo Rui)

In my youth, I was fond of listening to my mother's stories, stories about the immortals, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and cause and retribution. Deep in my young mind, I believed in the existence of the spiritual realm.

I received my secondary education in a Catholic missionary school run by the Marist Brothers. Under the influence of the church, I was baptized, became a pious Catholic and actively participated in many evangelical activities of the church. During this period of adolescence, I was deeply influenced by Brother Lee and Father Tong. Father Tong is a dedicated priest, who is well-versed in sociology and the psychology of adolescence. His talks on Catholicism were very persuasive. Brother Lee was my mathematics teacher who was sincerely concerned with the growth of each and every one of his students. He introduced me to the literature about life and spiritual cultivation of Catholic saints. They restrained themselves, feverishly cultivated virtue, discarded the vanity, prosperity and happiness of the mundane world, and were able to develop their spiritual lives to a transcendental dimension with some supernatural responses. I was thus convinced that Catholicism could help to elevate my spirit to a sublime state of existence.

Ten years later, I encountered a new religious movement, the Yi (義) Religion, or the Religion of Righteousness. This religion advocated the universality of five major world religions, namely, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Its transcendental principles were derived mainly from Buddhism and Taoism, whereas its

practical principles were based essentially on Confucian ethics. The founder of the Yi Religion claimed to have received a decree from the Creator of the Universe ordering him to dissolve the prejudice and strife among the various religious faiths. According to this religion, the founders of the five major world religions were messengers sent by the Creator to different nations at different times, to teach human beings how to cultivate virtue and avoid evil deeds, so that they would be able to achieve the spiritual fruit of perfection and eventually return to heaven and enjoy eternal bliss. I met the founder of the Yi Religion, had many discussions with him, and witnessed some miraculous events. This appeared to be a religious faith that could contribute to world peace, and it was more eclectic than Catholicism. I was thus converted to that religion.

Later, I came to Canada to further my study in education. In order to spread the Yi Religion among my friends, I started to read books on Buddhism and Taoism. The first Buddhist scripture I read was *The Diamond (Vajra) Sutra*. Although I did not really understand the commentary, I was thoroughly impressed by the profundity of the Buddhadharma and felt great joy at heart. I dreamed of climbing to the top of a lofty mountain and paying homage to a kind old monk. Later, when I came across some Buddhist texts published by the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, (then the Sino-American Buddhist Association) in the university library and saw the picture of the Venerable Tripitaka Master Hsüan Hua, I immediately recognized him to be the elder monk of my dream. As I learned more about the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and the life and cultivation of the Venerable Master and his disciples, especially the inconceivable responses of the Buddha-dharma, I realized that Buddhism is truly the most profound, comprehensive, inexhaustible, and all-penetrating ultimate Dharma for all beings. The teachings of the Yi Religion, as I later discovered, were merely compilations of fragments of words and phrases taken out of context from Buddhist Sutras, while the miraculous power of the Yi founder was none other than one of the deviant demonic states clearly described in the SHURANGAMA SUTRA. I dreamed of going to the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas one evening and following the four-fold assembly in bowing to the Venerable Master. Eventually, when the time was ready, my wife and I took refuge with the Venerable Master Hua, who exhorted me saying, "It is time for you to stop your guerrilla war-fare, and from now on, faithfully practice the Buddhadharma."

I have wandered along a meandering and bumpy external path and finally arrived at the Ultimate Proper Dharma Door that leads to the extinction of birth and death. My past experiences with Catholicism and the Yi Religion have awakened me to the superficiality and limitation of the outside-ways, and deepened my faith and dedication to the Buddha-dharma. After having taken refuge with the Triple Jewel, I had another wonderful dream, in which the Venerable Master came to our humble apartment and explained a particular Buddhist Sutra to my wife and I. In my dream, every detail was so vivid, especially the title of the Sutra and the explanation. Unfortunately, when I woke up in the morning, I could recall all the details of the dream except the title and commentary of the Sutra; I could not remember even a single word or phrase. This is indeed a sign to warn me that if I do not work hard and take myself across in this lifetime, in my future lives, I may turn incessantly in the Six Ordinary Dharma Realms without remembering all the proper Buddhadharma I had learned in this life.

*Human form is difficult to obtain, yet now I have obtained it.
Buddhadharma is difficult to hear, yet now I have heard it.
If I do not take myself across in this lifetime of mine,
Then in which lifetime can I ever take myself across.*