

## The Passing of Master Sheng Yen's first Western Dharma Heir, Dr John Crook

*82 years old (Chinese way of counting<sup>1</sup>)*

Dr John Crook, the late Master Sheng Yen's first Western Dharma Heir, Chung-hwa (Chinese) Chan Dharma Drum lineage, passed away on July 15, 82-year-old world life. John was Master Sheng Yen's successor. He inherited Shifu's compassionate vows of spreading Chinese Chan to the international world during his lifetime. He assumed the responsibility of guiding and teaching the European practitioners of Dharma. Through his effort in sowing the seeds of Chinese Chan Buddhism in the Western World, Chinese Chan Buddhism is now growing rapidly in Britain and other parts of Europe and America.

Dr John Crook was born in 1930. He is a pivotal figure in the rise of British primatology and socio-ecology. He first made contact with Buddhism in the 1950s. Retiring early from the Department of Psychology at the University of Bristol, he began practicing Zen Buddhism in intensive retreats taught in New York by Chan Master Sheng Yen of Dharma Drum Monastery, Taiwan, who in 1993 transmitted to him the authority to teach Chinese Zen. Shifu gave him the Dharma name: Chuan-deng Jing-di. He formed the Western Chan Fellowship with colleagues dedicating to promote Chinese Chan tradition in European countries. He has great influence on many students in the UK and elsewhere.

While visiting his first Dharma teacher in Hong Kong, Dr John Crook found '*Getting the Buddha Mind*' in English by Master Sheng Yen. He then went to New York at the end of May 1986 to attend Master Sheng Yen's seven-day retreat. Subsequently they formed a deep and most excellent master and disciple relationship. During a seven-day retreat in 1989, Dr John Crook received the Master's recognition. He became Shifu's representative in the UK and Shifu gave him permission to lead seven-day Chan retreats. Hence, the Chinese Chan tradition was spread to Europe.

Dr Crook invited Master Sheng Yen to lead a seven-day Chan retreat in Wales in 1989. That is the first time that Shifu led a retreat in Western countries outside the United States. Shifu once said<sup>2</sup>: "I remember when I visited England, my first Western Dharma Heir John Crook told me: 'The master has a talent of translating difficult Buddhist terms and concepts into easy and comprehensible modern languages, therefore many people can accept the teachings.' He is really in tune with me because that is exactly what I do."

Dr Crook was responsible for editing the work of Master Sheng Yen, 'Illuminating Silence'. The book records Master Sheng Yen's talks on the seven-day retreat in Wales. Dr Crook

---

<sup>1</sup> One is one years old when born, then add one each Chinese new year, so if one's birthday is after Chinese New Year then one will be age 2 on the first birthday by Western counting (Jinho)

<sup>2</sup> On the opening speech of the second international Conference on the Thought of Master Sheng Yen.

participated in the retreat, sharing his personal experiences through story, showing readers with simple and profound inner qualities. He said in the foreword of the book: “The practice of Chan is not easy but the results are far-reaching for life because it will open a new horizon”.

In order to transmit the teachings of Chan, Dr Crook has developed a program of retreats adapted to Western Zen practitioners. He prepared students for the intensive Chan retreat by releasing the backlog of internal emotions, emptying the self, and finding a path into meditation. He designed a Western Zen Retreat combining communication exercises with the practice of Western psychology theory suitable for the special needs of Westerners. His effort of bringing Dharma to the West is extremely remarkable.

In the course of three decades of Master Sheng Yen’s teaching career, as well as ten monastic Dharma Heirs in Taiwan, a total of seven other disciples had received his transmission. Although now Master Sheng Yen and Dr John Crook have both passed away, their inspiration and vows will be carried on by their disciples throughout the generations and pass on. The wisdom of the Buddha will shine through the world and reach everywhere on earth.

*Written by Yayin, Lin 18.07.2011, translated by Jinho 21.07.2011*