Preface and Biography of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu

Contents

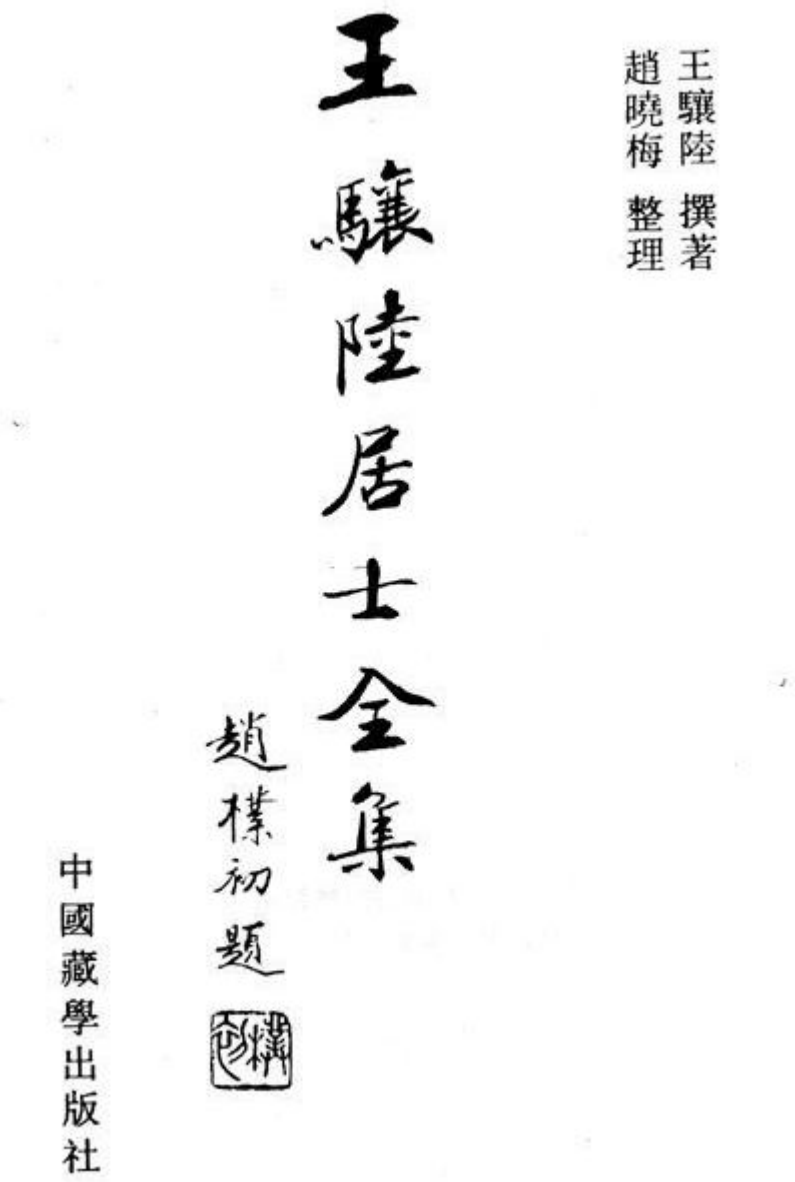
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Preface

A Brief Biography of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu

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Calligraphy of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu


心性釋義

Preface

The Chan teaching associated with Bodhidharma's coming from the West—holding up a flower to seal the mind, a special transmission outside the teachings, not founded on words and letters, directly pointing to the human mind, and seeing one's nature to attain Buddhahood—was, owing to the outstanding humanistic cultivation and noble qualities of our Chinese people, together with the broad foundations of Confucianism and Daoism, transmitted from master to master, refined and developed, and came to shine brilliantly during the Tang and Song dynasties. It became a splendid and singular flower of Chinese Buddhism.

From about the Southern Song dynasty onward, however, the time since the sages grew remote, people's hearts were no longer as they had been, and the foundations of the Way gradually weakened. People were not greatly suited to direct pointing. To accord with the times, the great Dharma of the Chan school therefore changed its style, replacing direct pointing with investigation of the huatou (critical phrase). By

means of the sense of doubt, it cut off deluded thoughts, causing the true potential to burst forth and enabling direct vision of the original reality. What painstaking care this entailed!

By modern times, sentient beings' obstructions had grown heavy and their faculties dull. Although they diligently investigated the huatou, they found it difficult to arouse a sense of doubt, and so retreated into silently repeating the huatou. As a result, even after twenty or thirty years, they gained no insight. Thus the Chan school, once so magnificent and lofty, with a powerful and distinctive tradition, gradually declined until it was barely alive. Even the Linji school, which alone now remains, mostly transmits the Dharma by issuing Dharma certificates and is unable to base the transmission of the robe and bowl on awakening to the Way and realizing the mind. This is deeply lamentable.

At Donglin Monastery on Mount Lu, our Acharya Dayu cultivated the Pratyutpanna Samādhi with extraordinary perseverance amid hardship. Having endured every difficulty, he entered deeply into meditative absorption, where Samantabhadra Bodhisattva appeared before him, conferred empowerment upon him, and transmitted the Dharma.

Samantabhadra told him that within the Esoteric Treasury there was the Heart-of-Heart Dharma, a formless supreme esoteric practice suited to the capacities of sentient beings in the Dharma-ending age. Through the power of the blessings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, it enabled practitioners to realize their original reality, achieving twice the result with half the effort. It could remedy the inadequacy of Chan practice, which relies solely on one's own efforts, and was especially suited to the needs of the age.

Moved to tears of gratitude, Master Dayu practiced with determination for seven arduous years. After thoroughly realizing his original reality, he descended the mountain to propagate the Dharma, causing a great stir throughout north and south China. No fewer than tens of thousands came in admiration to take refuge and receive the teaching, and he had more than two hundred close disciples. Later, because his many followers valued spiritual powers rather than the Way, Master Dayu changed his attire and went into seclusion. He instructed Wang Xianglu, the disciple who had grasped the marrow of his teaching, to succeed to the Dharma and transmit the Way. Later generations honored him as the second patriarch of the Mind-Seal school.

After succeeding to the Dharma, Wang received and guided later students without sparing any effort. He successively established Mind-Seal Viharas in Tianjin and Shanghai, widely transmitted the great Heart-of-Heart Dharma, and accepted no fewer than ten thousand disciples. Several hundred found their faith confirmed and

gained realization through practice. In the intervals between teaching the Dharma, he set down in writing the insights he had gained over the years and his experience in propagating the Way, so that they might be transmitted to future generations and widely disseminated.

His writings throughout his life were numerous and varied, without confinement to any single style. All urged people to honor the Way and do good, encouraged young people to strive for self-improvement, exhorted Buddhist disciples to cultivate diligently and attain realization, and elucidated the profound and hidden meanings of the Buddhist scriptures in order to help practitioners fully realize bodhi and swiftly reach the other shore. Their benefit to personal cultivation, social peace, and national prosperity needs no further explanation.

Wang's writings over the course of his life amounted to several million Chinese characters. Regrettably, nearly all were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Now his granddaughter, the lay practitioner Mingzhen, has made a great vow to collect them again for publication, carrying forward her grandfather's legacy and guiding future students. After searching in every direction, only part of them has been recovered. Important works such as Xinhuang and Vajra Longevity could not be found, a matter of deep regret.

The works now recovered are being prepared for publication in three parts. The first consists of uncovering hidden meanings in various scriptures, explaining their intent, and providing vernacular expositions. The second consists of Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935), Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Principle, and other lecture manuscripts. The third consists of essential instructions of the Mind-Seal Dharma and miscellaneous records.

The elucidation and explanation of the scriptures will be of immense help to future students. First, Buddhist terminology is abundant; second, classical Chinese is profound and difficult to understand; third, many people cannot read traditional characters. Consequently, young students encounter countless difficulties in reading the scriptures and cannot find an entryway. With this volume in hand, all such obstacles and difficulties are immediately dispelled.

Moreover, the meanings contained in the scriptures are profound and subtle; without genuine cultivation and realization, it is difficult to understand even a fraction of them. Wang has analyzed and fully disclosed the hidden and profound meanings contained in the scriptures. He may truly be said to have revealed what earlier generations had not revealed and to have gathered the great accomplishments of contemporary worthies. His work is indeed beyond comparison with ordinary scriptural commentaries. The scriptures he explains are all essential

classics of the Chan school and sūtras of definitive meaning beloved by the public, such as the Heart Sūtra, Diamond Sūtra, Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, and Amitābha Sūtra. For students who obtain them, the merit and virtue are truly immeasurable.

Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935) is a systematic work on cultivation and realization for Buddhist practitioners, beginning with arousing the resolve, proceeding through right cultivation, and culminating in realization of the Way and the expression of awakened functioning. Among Buddhist writings, most expound principles, doctrines, and ritual forms; few discuss methods of practice and the process of realizing the Way. Works that speak of what lies beyond the dharmakāya, or of realizing the essence and bringing forth its functioning, are almost nonexistent. This record discloses every crucial stage to the public without concealment, and later students have praised and revered it without end.

Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Principle is a powerful work intended to lead students into the gate of Buddhism and clarify its essential principle. If those who study Buddhism do not understand its essential principle, not only will they be unable to enter the Way, but they may also become attached to sectarian divisions, fault one school while praising another, and even risk entering demonic paths.

When one understands the essential principle, one knows that although skillful means have many gates, there are not two paths for returning to the source. One then dispels sectarian views and disputes over superiority and inferiority, avoids entering wrong paths, and can return home and sit securely, free from the error of entering demonic ways. In question-and-answer form, this work explains in detail the difficult questions students encounter in cultivation, the obstacles that may arise and how to address them, the various appearances that occur in meditative states, and how to grasp the opportunity for awakening so as to directly see one's original reality. It is truly a guide for Buddhist practitioners and an essential ford for entering the Way.

The Mind-Seal Dharma sayings and miscellaneous records were written by Wang to correct mistaken starting points in practice, moral decline, and unhealthy social customs; to guide aspiring students who wish to progress but do not know where to begin or how mind and nature differ and relate; and to instruct those who have practiced for a long time yet do not understand how to realize the mind and see their true nature.

He also offers guidance on how, after seeing one's true nature, to bring forth functioning at a higher level until practice becomes continuous and undivided. Such essential teachings, beneficial to body and mind and concerned with fully fathoming

principle and realizing one's nature, are too numerous to list. Readers are urged to consider them carefully.

Surveying the Complete Works as a whole, one finds that every piece upholds social morality, nurtures people's hearts, and supports a prosperous nation and a strong people; every chapter cultivates the mind and nurtures one's nature; every sentence points toward realizing the Way and attaining its fruition. Every character is a pearl; every phrase, precious jade. Concise yet comprehensive, refined and fitting, these are truly the masterpieces into which our Master Xianglu poured his heart and lifeblood.

This serves as the preface.

Respectfully written by Li Zhongding, a disciple of the first class of the Guiyou year

A Brief Biography of Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu

The lay practitioner Wang Xianglu's personal name was Zaiji; his courtesy name was Xianglu (also written Xiangliu), and his sobriquet was "Lay Practitioner Renzhi." He signed his writings "Dorje, Wang Xianglu of Haiyan, holder of the bodhisattva precepts" and "Upāsaka Wang Xianglu of Western Zhejiang, holder of the bodhisattva precepts." His ancestral home was Haiyan County, Zhejiang; his father's generation moved to Haining County (present-day Yanguan Township, Haining, Zhejiang).

The Master was born at the hour of xu on March 2, 1885, and passed away at the hour of xu on December 16, 1958. He was the second-generation lineage holder of the Mind-Seal school—the formless esoteric Heart-of-Heart Dharma—which emerged in the 1920s, and was revered as the school's Second Patriarch.

The Master was the sixth son of Wang Xinfu of the prominent Youhuai Hall Wang family of Haining, Zhejiang. His father was upright throughout his life and left office because he upheld principle. His mother, née Jiang, also came from a prominent family in Xiashi, Haining. She was a devout Buddhist, enjoyed giving generously and doing good, possessed exceptional wisdom, and excelled in traditional Chinese painting, especially paintings of orchids. She was known as "Elder Yanxiang."

The Master was born with a caul, which people at the time regarded as an auspicious sign. He was endowed with extraordinary intelligence and surpassed his peers. Even as a child, he could recite the Diamond Sūtra and fluently chant the Heart Sūtra from memory. In his youth, he often accompanied his mother on pilgrimages to the sacred mountain of Putuo. Avalokiteśvara's great vows of

compassion were deeply impressed upon his mind, and the roots of his bodhicitta had already taken deep hold.

During his youth, the Master applied himself diligently to study and became thoroughly versed in the classics and histories. At eighteen, he attained xiucai status under the late Qing examination system. He later studied English at St. John's University in Shanghai. In 1907, the thirty-third year of the Guangxu reign, at the age of twenty-two, he served as an interpreter accompanying an imperial commissioner on an investigative tour of India and Southeast Asia.

From childhood, he had kept in mind Xuanzang's spirit of braving hardships and dangers to travel to India in search of the scriptures. Now, having the exceptional karmic opportunity to visit the land of the Buddha in person, he paid homage at each of the sacred sites where Śākyamuni Buddha had practiced, visited eminent monastics, sought the Buddhadharma, and studied Sanskrit under a teacher. He resolved to study and practice diligently in order to propagate the true Dharma and benefit sentient beings. During his visit to India, his eldest daughter was born. To commemorate the journey, he named her "Fobao" ("Buddha Jewel").

After returning to China, the Master served in the Ministry of Communications of the Beiyang government. He initially practiced the Pure Land path, took refuge with Monk Xiaguang, gave generously to relieve the poor, and formed many wholesome affinities. Concerning his Buddhist study at that time, the Master later said: "Although I studied Buddhism with deep urgency, anxiously fearing that I would not have time enough, I had not yet realized the mind-ground; nevertheless, I already knew that one could not be confined to a single school." Thereafter, he consulted widely, sought teachings from many schools, went on to practice Chan, and studied the Buddhadharma, yet did not dare assume that he had found its essential point.

During the 1920s, the Master served as superintendent of telecommunications for the five provinces of Sichuan, Xikang, Tibet, Guizhou, and Yunnan. He established his superintendent's office in Chengdu and spent several years dealing with Sichuan warlords such as Liu Xiang. Witnessing the internecine warfare of the warlords and the suffering it inflicted upon the common people, he saw through the vicissitudes of official life, abandoned his high position and generous salary, and left Sichuan. After returning to Beijing, he took the eminent monk Acharya Dayu of Donglin Monastery on Mount Lu as his teacher. He devoted himself earnestly to the formless esoteric Heart-of-Heart Dharma, ultimately attaining deep samādhi and realizing the mind and seeing his true nature. He became a leading disciple of Patriarch Dayu, having received the essence of his teaching.

The Mind-Seal school—the formless esoteric Heart-of-Heart Dharma—was an esoteric teaching that came into public circulation during the 1920s.

In terms of its teaching, it belongs to Esoteric Buddhism, yet it enables practitioners to directly realize the mind-ground and is also connected with Chan and Pure Land practice. Its tradition fuses Chan, Pure Land, and Esoteric Buddhism into one, breaking through all fixed views of the Dharma to reach the ultimate. Its ritual procedures are simple and require no elaborate offerings. It makes no distinction between men and women, young and old, rich and poor: anyone able to sit for two hours may practice it. It is indeed a vast, excellent, complete, and fully endowed Dharma for beginning practitioners.

This school takes realizing the mind and seeing one's true nature as its primary aim, thereby accomplishing formless siddhi. The founding First Patriarch of the Mind-Seal school was Dayu. In the early 1920s, Patriarch Dayu saw the suffering and turmoil that followed the World War: social disorder, fear and insecurity, natural disasters and human-made calamities, extremely poor conditions for practice, and practitioners who lacked the essential points and whose faith was wavering.

In order to aid the world and relieve suffering, Patriarch Dayu practiced austerities for seven years. In samādhi, he received empowerment and transmission from the great bodhisattva Samantabhadra, thereby opening this Dharma gate. It is a wondrous method for directly realizing the mind-ground, the highest Fourth Gate of Suchness within Esoteric Buddhism. This esoteric practice neither relies upon appearances nor departs from them. Two-thirds depends on the power of the Buddha, and one-third on one's own power. It begins with cultivation of the eight consciousnesses, first breaking through ignorance and then subduing obscurations. In a short time, it can surely enable practitioners to realize their Original Face at the time when no thought arises and to attain the root.

It first breaks through ignorance; after awakening, it then removes habitual tendencies. Cultivation after awakening is a distinctive feature of this Mind-Seal school. All its methods of practice were specifically established by Patriarch Dayu after his direct realization on Mount Lu. Therefore, later practitioners who follow them can surely attain realization within two or three years.

To let people know of such a skillful and expedient Dharma gate, Patriarch Dayu, after descending the mountain, displayed a few spiritual powers wherever he went, causing a sensation throughout the country. Sixty or seventy thousand people sought the Dharma from him, and nearly two hundred became his close disciples. Yet many who sought the Dharma valued spiritual powers rather than the Way. Patriarch Dayu therefore changed his attire and retired into seclusion in Sichuan. He specially selected his principal disciple who had received the mind transmission, Lay Practitioner Wang Xianglu, to succeed to the Dharma and transmit the Way. Later generations revered him as the Second Patriarch of the Mind-Seal school.

From the 1920s through the 1930s, after the Master had cultivated the Heart-of-Heart Dharma and received its seal in the mind-ground, he returned to the study of the Buddhist scriptures. Only then did he understand that studying the scriptures after realizing the mind was entirely different from studying them previously. He therefore wrote detailed commentaries on the Diamond Sūtra, Heart Sūtra, Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch, Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment, Amitābha Sūtra, and other works. He also founded the Buddhist Study and Research Association, later renamed Mind-Seal Vihara, where he established a teaching seat to expound the scriptures and transmit the Dharma.

The Master's scriptural lectures were teachings given after awakening, grounded in actual experience of cultivation and realization. He penetrated deeply into Buddhist principle and possessed profound and comprehensive understanding. Zhang Dongsun of Peking University lectured on philosophy and, whenever he encountered questions concerning Buddhist studies, would personally visit the Master to seek his guidance. He greatly admired the Master's incisive explanations. The Master was also strict in educating his children, requiring them all to practice the Heart-of-Heart Dharma together and to complete all six sessions.

The Master's third son, Kexiang, his nephew Ren, and his youngest daughter, Dehua, still speak with deep emotion of practicing the Dharma with their father. In propagating the Dharma, the Master originally wished to become a monastic, but Patriarch Dayu instructed him to propagate the Dharma as a lay practitioner, since it was more convenient to spread this teaching in that capacity.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Master successively established Mind-Seal Viharas in Tianjin, Shanghai, and other places, where he conferred empowerment and transmitted the Dharma. In the two years 1934, the Jiaxu year, and 1935, the Yihai year, he gave more than four hundred lectures in Tianjin alone. At that time, countless people who took refuge with him realized the mind and recognized their true nature.

This was because the Master emphasized in transmitting the Dharma that "only a Dharma suited to the recipient is called right cultivation." Since people's capacities developed through past cultivation differ, some being sharp and others dull, the teaching must be adapted to each individual. Thus he emphasized giving the true Dharma according to the sharpness or dullness of the recipient's capacity, so that they might first realize the mind and see their true nature, attain fundamental wisdom, and then diligently remove habitual tendencies. Only then could they be liberated from birth and death.

Therefore: "When this association transmits the Dharma, it first considers a person's capacity, social circumstances, available time, physical strength, and so forth, and

only then transmits the Dharma, so as to avoid the drawback of doubt or retreating midway." "In transmitting the Dharma, this association does not rigidly adhere to any particular teaching. It is neither exclusively Pure Land, nor Esoteric, nor Chan; it is transmitted according to the recipient's capacity. Precepts, samādhi, and wisdom are all upheld naturally. It takes knowing one's intrinsic nature through the dhāraṇī Dharma as its essence, and the Dharma of prajñā as its function of skillful inspiration; it takes the Pure Land Dharma's realization of perfect enlightenment as its ultimate destination. In speaking of the essence of the precepts, it stresses the precept essence in order to prevent the sickness of attachment to precepts; in speaking of samādhi, it explains right samādhi in order to remove wrong views; and in speaking of wisdom, it calls for realizing the power of wisdom and cautions against arrogance and delusion."

"What we cultivate is the attainment of the root; our purpose is to seal the mind and gain genuine benefit." To those who single-mindedly disparaged other schools and divided the teachings into sects, the Master repeatedly admonished: such people had already departed from the meaning of purity, were not disciples of the Buddha, and could never attain rebirth in the Pure Land. Yet, "the division into schools facilitates focused practice—that is, entering deeply through one gate. Because people differ in capacity and have differing natural affinities, an order of precedence is established; but when they reach the other shore, all return to the same source." "The intent of every school and every Dharma is to make use of provisional means. One must cultivate until dharmas are empty and return to the Original Face of the mind-ground; only then can one be said to have understood."

During his ten years in Tianjin, in addition to conferring empowerment and transmitting the Dharma, the Master completed many scriptural commentaries. According to the partial catalogue of works printed by Mind-Seal Vihara, these included Records of the Yihai Lectures (1935), Questions and Answers on Entering Buddhism and Understanding Its Essential Principle, Xinhuang, A Thorough Section-by-Section Explanation of the Diamond Sūtra, A Thorough Section-by-Section Explanation of the Heart Sūtra, The First Essential Determination in Studying Buddhism, Practice of the Six-Syllable Great Bright Mantra, Secrets of Cultivating the Mind, Vajra Longevity, Do I Have Afflictions?, and Gāthās for the Yogic Flaming-Mouth Rite.

In the middle period of the War of Resistance against Japan, at the invitation of lay practitioners Wu Limen, Cai Chu'ang, Hou Junlu, and others, the Master went from Tianjin to Shanghai to transmit the Dharma. At the Xijin Guild Hall on Haining Road, he established Mind-Seal Vihara, where he continued to confer empowerment and transmit the Dharma, established a practice center, and frequently traveled to Hangzhou, Suzhou, Jiaxing, Huzhou, Haining, and other places to transmit the

Dharma. He accepted many believers, spared no effort, lived simply, and treated all people equally.

He was especially kind and compassionate toward working people. In choosing disciples, he valued virtue and cultivation and did not seek offerings. He would always earnestly tell people: “Everyone living in society must understand the way of conducting oneself; there is no one who should not study Buddhism. To study Buddhism is to know oneself, understand one’s outlook on life, and comprehend the reasons for being human. In brief, it is to understand the principles of being human. This is loyalty.

“Apply these principles to others and penetrate all their mental states; only then can one fulfill the way of relating to others. This is reciprocity. One concerns oneself, and the other concerns others. Then human relationships and shared undertakings in society can all reach perfection. Thus it can be seen that the Buddhadharma is the most essential learning and the greatest undertaking in human life; it is not passive self-benefit.

“Passive self-benefit is what the Buddha least permits, because the Buddhadharma saves the world and saves minds.” In transmitting the Dharma and lecturing on the scriptures, the Master strove to make his teachings plain and easy to understand. Throughout his life, he devoted himself tirelessly to benefiting the world and liberating people. He wrote several million characters, but a great number of his manuscripts were burned during the Cultural Revolution, a matter of profound regret. Fortunately, the works that had been published were preserved by his disciples and students.

After victory in the War of Resistance, the Master successively held forty-nine-day Dharma assemblies in Shanghai and Tianjin, praying for blessings for the people and for the cessation of calamities.

In 1958, the Master manifested signs of illness at his Shanghai residence, yet he continued earnestly to instruct students that the transmission of the Dharma must involve strict selection and that it must never be bestowed lightly. On December 16, 1958, knowing that he was about to depart, he specially summoned his chief disciples Wu Limen, Li Zhongding, and others, as well as his eldest daughter Fobao (Shuwen), and repeatedly instructed them: “This Heart-of-Heart Dharma is the finest, swiftest, and most direct great Dharma for directly realizing one’s Original Face in the Dharma-ending age.

“Chan practice relies on one’s own effort; without twenty or thirty years, it is extremely difficult to attain thorough realization. Moreover, qualified teachers are lamentably becoming fewer by the day. The times have changed, making it very difficult for Chan to become widely accessible. The Heart-of-Heart Dharma, however,

has a simple ritual procedure and brings realization especially swiftly. With concentrated practice for two or three years, one may equal the achievement of twenty or thirty years."

"This great Dharma was personally received by my revered master, Patriarch Dayu, who, after enduring countless hardships, received empowerment and transmission from Mahāsattva Samantabhadra in samādhi.

After seven years of practice, he opened this dharma gate. Surely this was a matter of great causes and conditions! I fear that people may not understand these causes and conditions. It should therefore be widely propagated and made known to others. Do not let interpersonal matters hinder this great Dharma. You must place the greater whole first; then the merit and virtue of protecting the Dharma will surpass an offering of the seven treasures filling a great trichiliocosm. Remember this well: this great Dharma must be widely propagated to benefit the world and liberate people." At this point, hot tears streamed down as he repeatedly gave these instructions. In the last days of his illness, he formed the mudrā of the Wish-Fulfilling Dhāraṇī for several days, then lay peacefully on his right side in the auspicious reclining posture and passed away.

It has now been thirty-six years since this outstanding master departed. After enduring many vicissitudes, the great Heart-of-Heart Dharma of the Mind-Seal school has at last not failed its master's hopes. It is now practiced by ever more practitioners, not only in mainland China but also in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Europe, and America. There are disciples of the Mind-Seal school in all these places, and, through its exceptional Dharma affinities, the Heart-of-Heart Dharma is spreading throughout the world. May this complete collection offer practitioners a greater wealth of essential Dharma teachings.

(Author: Mingzhen)