

A Young Lama with A Legend

By Zola Zhou



Yangsi Rinpoche at Shechen Monastery seminar

Dilgo Khyentse Yangsi was only 17 when he toured the world to teach Buddhism.

“Having a desire in mind is like holding a poisoned caterpillar on the hands,” Yangsi once told his disciples during a Hong Kong teaching in 2017. “You need to get rid of it first, and then try to convert it to positive thoughts.”

Buddhist leaders confirmed that Yangsi was the reincarnation of Dilgo Khyentse, a well-known Tibetan Buddhist master who was the teacher of the current Dalai Lama.

Students and disciples worldwide honored Yangsi as a Rinpoche, an honorific title in Tibetan to describe a highly respected religious teacher.

In Tibetan Buddhist practice, highly realized masters will predict their future reincarnated birth by leaving a prophecy for their adept disciples to search for the incarnation, said Neil Tse, 39, one of Yangsi’s disciples from Hong Kong.

Born in Nepal on June 30, 1993, Yangsi was discovered by Dilgo Khyentse’s senior disciple through dreams, visions and a four-line poem revealing Yangsi’s birthdate, birthplace and parents’ names.

At the age of 2, Yangsi was confirmed as the reincarnation by the current Dalai Lama and enthroned a year later at Shechen Monastery in Nepal, which was attended by thousands of students worldwide.

Even though Yangsi was born with fame inherited from his predecessor, he once said he would rather be a common monk and experience humanity's suffering.

"As the reincarnation [of Dilgo Khyentse], my life is arranged well by the people around me. I don't need to worry about washing my own clothes or making money," Yangsi said. "My biggest loss is that I have not experienced suffering."

After his enthronement, Yangsi was forced to leave his parents to come to Bhutan for an education, which "was not easy for a young kid," according to Sally Williams, Yangsi's English tutor for ten years.

"His day is full," Williams said, "starting at 6 a.m. with morning prayers and prostrations."

On weekdays, Yangsi studied math, geography, history, science and dharma, the practices and virtues of Tibetan Buddhism, all in English. He loved reading stories and his favorite writers were Roald Dahl and Roger Hargreaves.

Over the weekend, Yangsi would cook with Williams to make gingerbread men and blueberry cheesecake.

"He loves to get his hands messy," Williams said.

Monk Sean Price from Shechen Monastery, 49, an assistant translator for Yangsi, said Yangsi appeared more mature than his years.

"Some guys in the early years would play around a bit, but he took his role seriously. He knew that he has a job to do," Price said. "From a very young age he has understood the importance of his position within society."

After completing *Shedra*, a nine-year philosophical college course in Bhutan, Yangsi started a world tour that began at Shechen Monastery in Nepal to teach dharma in 2010, which included visits to numerous Buddhist centers in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Malaysia.

Lily Yeung, 28, one of Yangsi's disciples who first met him at his Bhutan teaching in 2015, said Yangsi valued his encounter with each disciple even though he had thousands of them.

"He remembers every conversation we had, even tiny details like the jokes we had years ago, the name of the café we were chatting at ... everything," Yeung said. "When he talks to you and occasionally gives advice, it feels just like an old friend, a common man, but wiser."

During his world teaching tour, Yangsi emphasized repeatedly that he was a common monk who is imperfect and has temptation. He said he once loved five-star hotels and first-class flights.

“I was once attached to the fame and reverence that I was born with,” said Yangsi at his Hong Kong teaching. “Attachment is the thing that brings problems. You should focus on the things that you are attached to, cut it, and then you are free.”



Yangsi enthroned



17-year-old Yangsi