

= Ho Yuen Hoe =

Ho Yuen Hoe (simplified Chinese : 何允娥 ; traditional Chinese : 何允娥 ; pinyin : Hé Rùnhé ; 18 February 1908 ? 11 January 2006) , later in life but rarely known by her Dharma name , Venerable Jing Run (simplified Chinese : 静润 ; traditional Chinese : 靜潤 ; pinyin : Jìngrùn Fǒu) , was a Buddhist nun affectionately known as Singapore 's " grand dame of charity " in recognition of her lifelong devotion in helping the old and needy . She was the abbess of Lin Chee Cheng Sia Temple and the founder in 1969 of the Man Fut Tong Nursing Home , the first Buddhist nursing home . Venerable Ho was relatively unknown to the public until 1996 , when she was featured in a television programme ? The Extraordinary People ? at the age of 88 . As a result , the public came to know more about her work and her nursing home . In 2001 , she received the Public Service Award from the President of Singapore in recognition of her contribution to the country . Until her hospitalisation in November 2005 she was actively involved in charity work . Venerable Ho died on 11 January 2006 , a month before what would have been her 98th birthday .

= = Early life = =

Ho Yuen Hoe was born on 18 February 1908 , to a family of silk weavers in Guangzhou , China , the second of three children . Her family was poor , and she was sold when she was five years old . Barely two years later , the spinster who had purchased her died , and Ho was sold by the woman 's nephew , to become a maid . After a few years she was sold again . In her late teens , a group of snakeheads persuaded her and several other girls to emigrate to Singapore , ostensibly to work on a rubber plantation , but the job did not materialise . At the age of 21 , alone and penniless , she married the owner of a grocery business . When the business failed , they left for Hong Kong , hoping for better fortune . Ho became a hairdresser in nearby Macau , but after discovering that her husband had another wife and children she decided to return to Singapore alone , vowing never to remarry . At about that same time , she became a vegetarian .

In 1936 , with the help of a friend , the then 28 @-@ year @-@ old Ho set up shop in Chinatown with only a comb , a stool , and a kerosene lamp . She worked from 8 am to 3 am , charging five cents to comb hair or weave plaits and buns for amahs and Samsui women . She did that every day for almost three decades , interrupted only by periods when she was incapacitated by acute attacks of arthritis . She scrimped and saved , and by the time she was in her 40s , she had enough to buy a shophouse in Club Street . Although illiterate , she made some property investments and eventually became a landlord , renting out rooms . As her wealth grew , she acquired more properties , and she began to adopt children from poor families , becoming a single mother of six daughters and twenty @-@ five godchildren .

= = Charity work = =

A devout Buddhist from youth , once her children had grown up Ho decided to serve the Buddhist cause , and to dedicate the rest of her life to caring for others . In 1958 , she became a Buddhist nun at the age of 50 . In 1969 , aged 61 , Ho bought a two @-@ storey detached house in Richards Avenue with her savings , and turned it into the Man Fut Tong Old Peoples ' Home for aged sick and single elderly women . Most of the 20 or so residents had neither enough earnings to support themselves nor any relatives to turn to . To raise additional funds for the home , she cultivated and sold prize @-@ winning white orchids at Tanglin , and vegetarian food at Kong Meng San Temple in Bishan . She cleaned , cooked , took her charges to the doctors , helped them to collect their social benefits and even sometimes saw to their last rites .

Venerable Ho 's work was unknown to the public until 1996 , when she was featured in a television programme ? The Extraordinary People ? at the age of 88 . As a result , the public came to know more about her and her nursing home . When asked why she had set up an old folks ' home , Venerable Ho replied :

I used to feed the old folks at some of the homes , and it would sadden me to see them so yellow

and swallow . One of them told me , they would go in ' vertical ' and probably exit ' horizontal ' . I might be illiterate but I wanted to give back to society . I didn 't want to sit around and wait to die .

Inspired by Venerable Ho 's devotion and compassion , volunteers and donations began to stream in , allowing the home to provide better medical care and facilities for its residents . Spurred on by the desire to do even more , she approached the government for a piece of land to expand her old folks ' home . The Ministry of Health gave her a 5 @, @ 000 @-@ square @-@ metre (1 @. @ 2 @-@ acre) plot in Woodlands , on which she oversaw the building of a new home . To help in raising funds for its construction , she published a recipe book called Top 100 Vegetarian Delights in 1998 , which brought in more than S \$ 100 @, @ 000 (U \$ 66 @, @ 667) . In August 2001 , the new four @-@ storey building was opened at Woodlands Street 82 . It houses nearly 235 sick and elderly and provides residential , rehabilitation , and day @-@ care services . The home is open to all regardless of age , gender , race or religion . It regularly organises in @-@ house activities such as cooking , hand @-@ craft , karaoke , and games , as well as visits to places of interest and participation in various community events . The original home is now a Buddhist temple , the Lin Chee Cheng Sia Temple .

Despite her advancing age , Venerable Ho continued to raise funds to provide better medical care , and she set up committees to help organise Dharma classes for children and secure donations for various Buddhist causes . During an interview given to The Straits Times in 2004 , she said : " Everything in life is transient . Only charity is real and enduring . When you give , you receive . Charity is the best antidote for bad karma . "

She was not only successful in raising funds , but she also secured donations in kind and services . A Hindu charity , Shree Gniananda Seva Samajam donated S \$ 75 @, @ 000 to the Man Fut Tong Nursing Home in 2004 , which was raised through ticket sales for a charity draw . On 11 February 2004 , President S R Nathan , attended her birthday @-@ cum @-@ charity dinner and gave a speech in tribute of her contributions to the country :

This Man Fut Tong Nursing Home Charity Dinner event marks the 96th Lunar Birthday of Ven . Ho Yuen Hoe . More importantly , it reflects what Ven . Ho has done over many years to look after the needy sick and distressed elderly , irrespective of their race , language or religion . As we look back at what Ven . Ho has done for her cause over the years , she well deserves to be recognized as a formidable role model for both young and old Singaporeans ... My wife and I wish Ven . Ho a Very Happy Birthday ? good health and happiness , and thank her for her valuable contributions to the community . We also wish the Man Fut Tong Nursing Home every success in serving the sick and needy elderly in Singapore .

= = Death = =

On 11 January 2006 , Venerable Ho died peacefully in her sleep at the Man Fut Tong Nursing Home , at about 9 : 30 pm , just one month before turning 98 . Until being hospitalised in November 2005 , she had cooked for and looked after herself and played an active role in running both the temple and the nursing home . During her hospital stay , she suffered a stroke , which affected her speech and paralysed the left side of her body . Discharged in December 2005 , she was recuperating well at the nursing home until she developed a chest infection and breathing difficulties a few days before she died .

After her death , President S R Nathan sent a wreath of roses , chrysanthemums and orchids . Several government ministers attended her wake , including Senior Minister of State for Health Balaji Sadasivan , Minister of State for Community Development , Youth and Sports Yu @-@ Foo Yee Shoon , Minister of State for Education and Trade and Industry Chan Soo Sen , and Northwest Community Development Council mayor Teo Ho Pin . Temple officials said she left instructions for S \$ 100 @, @ 000 to be distributed equally to 10 charities . She had purchased a simple coffin 10 years before her death , and she had also set aside S \$ 10 @, @ 000 to pay for her funeral .

On 22 January 2006 , 20 chartered buses took more than 1 @, @ 000 mourners ? devotees , her godchildren , scores of wheelchair @-@ bound residents , representatives from various Buddhist temples , and well @-@ wishers ? to Tse Tho Aum Buddhist Temple in Sin Ming Drive for the final

prayers and cremation . The abbess ' ashes were kept for 100 days at her temple , before making their way to her final resting place in Zhejiang province in China , where her niece lives . As a follow @-@ up to her funeral , her remains and personal items were put on one @-@ day public display at her temple on 26 February 2006 . The relics (Sariras) displayed were crystalline or pearl @-@ like deposits found in Venerable Ho 's ashes . Buddhists believe these are usually found in cremated Buddhist masters , are holy , and treat them with reverence .

Since Venerable Ho 's death , her work at the temple and nursing home has been administered by Reverend Seck Cheng Charn and Reverend Tang Wai Sum respectively .

= = Commemoration = =

A pictorial book chronicling Venerable Ho 's life , written in both English and Mandarin was launched at the Remembering Venerable Ho Charity Lunch held at the Meritus Mandarin Hotel on 28 January 2007 . Called A Life For Others , the 138 @-@ page book was written by Dr Uma Rajan , the home 's executive director . Five hundred hardcover copies of the book have been printed to raise funds for the Home , which costs S \$ 4 @. @ 5 million a year to run .

A bronze sculpture by sculptor Chern Lian Shan , and a portrait of Venerable Ho by artist Marcus Lim were also unveiled at the event , by His Excellency , President S. R. Nathan . Both the sculpture and the painting are now on display at the Woodlands home . A new hybrid orchid , created from the orchids Dendrobium ' Ekapol ' and Dendrobium ' Lim Hepa ' , was also officially named ' Venerable Ho Yuen Hoe ' and presented by Mrs. S. R. Nathan .

In 2001 , Venerable Ho received the Public Service Medal from President S. R. Nathan at the Istana .