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Title: Chinese-Canadian wanted the best and found this in the Monastery of Saint Dimyana

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Photo: Mother Theoliptie

Mother Theoliptie is a Chinese-Canadian Coptic Orthodox nun who has resided at St. Demiana's Monastery for about 16 years. (Demiana is the preferred spelling of the Monastery, our preferred spelling, related to our transliteration system, is Dimyana). Her story is one of remarkable change. I wrote this interview for the March issue of the Maadi Messenger of which I have become the editor.

The monastery is situated north of Mansoura in the Delta of Egypt. I have known Mother Theoliptie for at least eight years. In 2011, the detailed life story of Saint Demiana, translated to English by the nuns, was forwarded to me and [published in Arab-West Report](#).



*Maadi Messenger
Cover*

It was natural for me, as a Dutchman, to meet with Mother Theoliptie since she is a Chinese born in Hong Kong and raised in Toronto, Canada, thus she speaks fluent English. In January 2014, I went with two American friends to the Monastery, spent two nights there, and we were guided through the monastery by Mother Theoliptie. She showed us paintings of icons, making mosaic icons, sewing clerical attire and clothing for baby baptism, weaving leather crosses, painting wooden crosses and icons, making crowns and hats for clergies and other very beautiful handiwork made by dedicated nuns who meditate and pray while making these items.



Monastery of St. Dimianah

I had seen the monastery in the early 1980s when I was the guest of the late Father Hedra and a local Christian guide Wagdy who have both passed away. The monastery has greatly expanded in the past thirty years. Mother Theoliptie has documented the changes in photo slideshows since she is the photographer of the monastery.



Leather Crosses

Mother Theoliptie shared her personal spiritual conversion from Buddhism to Coptic Orthodoxy with us.

What made a Buddhist Chinese-Canadian woman become a Coptic Orthodox nun in Egypt?

“All my ancestors are pure Chinese descendants from China. My father is an atheist and my mother is a Buddhist. They do not believe in an Almighty Creator God. I was born in Hong Kong as the seventh child of eight siblings, and we all believed in Buddhism. When I was four years old, my family immigrated to Canada, where I was raised and

educated. I graduated as a pharmacist at the University of Toronto. I grew up as a Buddhist. I believed in Buddhism until age 22, whereby I then converted to Coptic Orthodoxy. Since my childhood, I loved spirituality and prayers to the extent that I desired to become a Buddhist nun.

When I was 16 year old, I returned to Hong Kong for a summer vacation with some members of my family and we visited a Buddhist temple and I felt I could not pray there, which led me to accept it would not be suitable for me to become a Buddhist nun.

In Canada, I completed high school and my university studies and did a lot of volunteer work. One of my volunteering jobs was visiting an elderly Protestant woman in her late seventies. She told me about her faith in Christianity. I felt her love for God was greater than my love for God, yet her God was not my God, thus I prayed to God to reveal Himself to me. Miraculously, during a phone call to her, a miracle happened: while conversing with her on the phone, suddenly, I felt a deep powerful feeling of love and peace from God which is out of this world--this was a spiritual heavenly feeling better than all the riches in the world. I felt at that time a glimpse of heaven and many questions came to mind. While all this was happening to me, the elderly woman did not know.

After receiving the heavenly feeling, I met with Monica Guirguis-Iskander, a Coptic Orthodox pharmacy friend of mine from the University of Toronto. She introduced me to the Coptic Orthodox Church. I also discovered there were many different Christian churches, which made Christianity confusing to me. I spent one and a half years church shopping to understand the differences among them. I wanted to join the best church for me and was led to the Coptic Orthodox Church by God. It is the most difficult church for me to join since I am not Egyptian and did not understand Arabic, yet what attracted me most to the Coptic Orthodox Church is its spiritual richness.

Monica and others of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Canada told me of Saint Demiana's Monastery in Egypt. I wanted to visit this monastery because Saint Demiana had become my favorite saint and I was baptized with her name. Moreover, Saint Demiana was the first official abbess and founder of monasticism for Coptic Orthodox nuns in the early 4th century-- this attracted me since I also wanted to become a nun. Saint Demiana was a martyr and I have no fear to become a martyr, which is the most and best of what one can give to God.

During my first visit to the monastery, I was overwhelmed with joy and much love from the nuns, more than I felt from other monasteries. I returned back to Canada but the experience of visiting the Monastery of Saint Demiana kept following me. Two years later, I indeed decided to return to Egypt for a second visit. During this second visit, I heard the voice of God calling me to enter the monastery as a servant. I spoke with the abbot of the monastery, His Eminence Metropolitan Bishoy, who accepted me into the monastery. I returned to Toronto, Canada to quit my job as a pharmacist and close my accounts, and then I left Toronto permanently and entered the monastery at age 27.”

How did your family respond?

“My family was shocked. They did not know I was that religious. I had earlier promised my sister to be her bridesmaid. Shortly before entering the monastery, I heard the voice of God telling me that He did not want me to return and I complied. My younger brother was upset: “How can you not come back for the wedding of our sister?” he said. My family was upset but, with the grace of God, they accepted that I have decided to become a Coptic nun.

What does the Holy Family’s visit of Egypt mean to you?

“I was baptized at St. Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Church in Toronto and at that time I did not know anything about the Holy Family coming to Egypt since I was a new Christian. But once I knew about this, I knew Egypt was blessed due to their visit. Although Egypt’s standard of living is lower than western countries and the environment is polluted, but the country is deeply rich in spirituality. I love Egypt because it can give me what is most important--to be as close to God as possible.”

How did you experience the January 25 revolution?

”Nuns do not follow the news. We do not have newspapers, no TV or radio and do not look for news on the internet, but we hear of things when people ask us to pray. We heard of the January 25 revolution when our late Pope Shenouda III asked all Copts internationally to fast and pray for three days for the peace and well-being of Egypt, and others asking for our prayers, thus we realized something was happening. I am sure Egypt will be blessed because these are God’s promises.”