2019

Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women

Karma Lekshe Tsomo PhD
University of San Diego, tsomo@sandiego.edu

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Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women

Edited by
Karma Lekshe Tsomo
Out of the Shadows
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Introduction

In the last few decades, Buddhist women have come out of the shadows and begun to take a visible role in their traditions and on the world stage. Since 1987, when the 1st Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women was held in Bodhgaya, India, Buddhist women have joined hands and sparked a transformation of consciousness in the Buddhist world toward greater inclusion and diversity regarding gender, ethnicity, religion, and social opportunity. Every two years, women and men, lay and ordained, from a rich variety of cultural backgrounds, academic disciplines, and religious traditions, meet together to discuss Buddhist women's history, values, and perspectives on contemporary issues. These gatherings uniquely incorporate scholarly presentations, sitting meditations, chanting practices, small group discussions, and cultural performances to understand the experiences of Buddhist women around the world. The 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held in Seoul, Korea, from June 27 to July 4, 2004, was a unique international gathering.

Creating a dialogue that unites so many people, disciplines, and perspectives in an atmosphere of mutual respect is a significant contribution to human society. It is especially significant that this dialogue has been initiated by Buddhist women, a segment of society that until recently has been largely ignored. Since 1987, when Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women was formed, scholars, practitioners, artists, and activists from around the world have begun to unite at a grassroots level and assume leadership in working for the welfare of the world’s Buddhist women. In a matter of years, working steadily and diligently, despite limited resources, the Buddhist women's movement gained strength and became recognized as a highly dynamic forum representing over 300 million women worldwide. This global movement, emerging from obscurity into the international spotlight as a force for social change, exemplifies how women from different Buddhist traditions can unite, work harmoniously together, and make significant progress toward global understanding.

The chapters in Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women were selected from the conference papers presented at the 8th Sakyadhita Conference in Seoul by many unique individuals. Selected by many unique individuals, the theme “Socially Engaged Buddhist Women” was open to many approaches and interpretations, so each writer had the freedom to craft her contribution as she chose. For this reason, the chapters differ in tone, complexity, and length. The chapters are interconnected, but can be read independently as well. Each article opens a window on a different world, a new vantage point form which to consider women's spiritual, intellectual, social, and political potential. What is most heartwarming about the chapters is that they all evolved from the sincere motivation to benefit others.

The challenges that Buddhist women face in the world today are formidable. Gender bias, poverty, illiteracy, human rights violations, environmental degradation, economic disparities, and political strife are
but a few of these challenges. On a personal level, Buddhist women have increasingly become aware of the gender bias that permeates their societies – biased attitudes toward women that are often presumed, without due thought. For example, even though Buddha Sakyamuni recognized women’s equal spiritual potential over two thousand years ago, many Buddhist women still do not have the same opportunities that men do for secular education or religious instruction. Although women in Buddhist societies may have more social freedoms than many other women, they hold few positions of power in the realms of politics and religion. And although women may not be consciously oppressed or silenced, their potential has certainly been neglected. Fully empowering women requires a change in awareness that challenges the status quo on narrow definitions of women’s potential, and initiates meaningful reflection, analysis, and positive solutions for social change.

Sakyadhita’s conferences and publications represent a vision of women working cooperatively across boundaries of ethnicity, nationality, economic status, educational background, and religious affiliation. Fully appreciating the differences of language and culture that ordinarily separate human beings, teams of scholars, practitioners, and volunteers join together to create a vibrant international forum to discover the uniqueness of women’s histories and experiences, as well as their commonalities. These visionary individuals and groups work for social change in a spirit of peace and harmony, dispelling the shadows of discrimination, ignorance, and social limitations, and offering a beacon of light in a world of strife.

A number of books have appeared in recent years on the topic of Engaged Buddhism, but women’s efforts have generally been relegated to a single chapter, if they appear at all. In Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women, it is clear that women’s contributions have been extensive and profound. The volume begins by describing Buddhist women’s lives in specific Buddhist cultures and particular eras of world history. The sections discuss Buddhist education, everyday practice, and meditation practices from Buddhist women’s perspectives. Perhaps the most invisible segment of Buddhist societies are the nuns who, out of the limelight, have dedicated their lives to the achievement of liberation in every aspect of their lives. While some Buddhist women live solitary lives in solitude, others are actively engaged in social change. The chapters describe their heroic struggles and some of the many projects they have initiated for the social good. The controversial issue of full ordination for Buddhist women is also considered, from several perspectives, as well as issues of particular interest to Buddhist women in the contemporary world.

In this volume, stories about the experiences of women in remote regions like Mongolia and Zangskar appear alongside essays on philosophy and history. The fact that so many different voices are included and valued is profound testimony to Buddhist women’s diversity in terms of their educational background and approach to social concerns. It is an immense privilege to honor the hard work that these women are doing to benefit society, even against great odds. We are pleased to highlight these achievements, so that readers can learn more about the Buddhist traditions and the vibrant communities of Buddhist women practitioners around the world. We are especially pleased to include the voices of women who may not have a voice in their own societies. The variety of these articles reflects the diversity of the contributors, which is the strength of the Buddhist women’s movement. Each writer shares a glimpse of wisdom, offered in a spirit of compassion, from her own corner of the world. Their words express the vitality of the Buddhist traditions that have endured for centuries to support the spiritual and intellectual development of millions of people.

Many organizations and individuals have contributed time, resources, and energy to make this volume possible. For their efforts in organizing the 9th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, we are deeply indebted to the Korean Bhikkhuni Association, Joong Ang Sangha University, and Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women. We are equally grateful to the many scholars,
practitioners, performers, and participants who traveled from countries around the world to share their ideas, talents, and experiences at the conference. To all those who helped with editing and translation in the preparation of this volume, particularly Evelyn Diane Cowie and Rebecca Paxton, we would like to express our deepest appreciation. We are honored and immensely grateful to include the artwork of the master painter Ho-Shin Lee of Korea (page 148) and the photographs of Mike Barber of Honolulu. By the merit of these combined efforts, may the sufferings of the world diminish and compassion prevail.
Buddhist Women and Society
Buddhist Women and a Compassionate Society

Martine Batchelor

This article reviews the status of Buddhist nuns and considers how Asian societies and Buddhism influenced each other in regard to the position of Buddhist nuns over time. It then presents a brief view of the present situation and its social connotations. Case stories of Buddhist women, nuns or laywomen, acting and compassionately influencing their own societies in Thailand, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan are included. I either interviewed the women myself or had access to women's magazines or writings about the person concerned.

The Buddha stated that women and men were equal in terms of the possibility of enlightenment and for this reason let them be ordained as equal members in his monastic community. In his time, there were many great enlightened and accomplished nuns. However, as Buddhism was transmitted from India to other Asian countries, the ordination of women was not always transmitted and sometimes died out. For example, in Sri Lanka the full ordination was transmitted, died out, and was never started again. It never reached Thailand or Burma. The full ordination was transmitted by Sri Lankan nuns to China and from there went to Korea where to this day it is prospering. It went briefly to Japan, but fell into obsolescence. Because of this historical situation, nowadays there are great differences in the positions of Buddhist nuns in countries like Korea or Thailand.

In Korea, there is full ordination and the nuns are equal to the monks. They have their own nunneries, seminaries, meditation halls, and city temples. They teach the sūtras, lead chanting, and serve the laypeople in exactly the same way as the monks. They are highly respected and supported by the laity.

In Thailand, the nuns are not recognized as such by either the government or the male Buddhist establishment. Their status is neither monastic nor lay. For many centuries, responding to a spiritual calling, they have tried in their own way to lead a monastic life. They have very low status and very little opportunity to study or meditate, though this is changing as nuns are learning to organize and work for change. There is also a movement to reestablish the full ordination for women. Long ago, Venerable Voramai Kabilsingh, a Thai nun, went to Taiwan to receive full ordination. When she returned she was questioned very closely about it by the Buddhist establishment but was allowed to pursue her activities. The main reason she did, she said, was to prove that a woman could be fully ordained and be an example for other women in Thailand. Recently her daughter Chatsumarn Kabilsingh was ordained as a samānerī in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, the ordination for women died out in the eleventh century and was not revived as was done twice for the ordination of the monks. However in the nineteenth century, emerging from a long period of colonization, Buddhist laypeople in Sri Lanka began to resist domination by Western Christian powers. Women were at the forefront of this movement. Some laywomen decided to take the ten precepts, shaved their heads, started to wear saffron and white robes, and formed Buddhist communities. The color of their dress was symbolic, incorporating the saffron of the monks’ robes with the white of the laypeople's clothes. This was to show that they had created a new status, which was neither entirely monastic nor fully lay. Their first step was to open a school to educate young girls. Because of their in-between status they were
not under the control of the government or the Buddhist establishment. Some thought it would be best to keep it that way, since it gave them the freedom to be more creative in dealing with people and helping in the wider society. However, a strong movement appeared in Sri Lanka to restore the full ordination for nuns and recently the *bhikṣuṇī* order was reestablished.

In Japan, this century saw a renewal for Buddhist nuns. After being kept in very lowly positions for many centuries and confined to menial tasks, nuns have improved their official status. They can now teach, perform important ceremonies, be abbesses of temples, and can even attain ranks as high as monks. They have formed a Buddhist nuns’ association and created educational opportunities. In the process, society has recognized the purity of their practice and ethics in comparison to the practice of monks. The monks had been allowed to marry, but not the nuns. Marriage has had a certain weakening effect on the practice of the monks, their ethics, and their reasons for being in the monasteries. Often young men have to become monks in order to inherit temples from their fathers, not out of a great commitment. “Nuns make an independent and personal commitment to the Dharma. Nuns, therefore, maintain relatively traditional lifestyles in the midst of a technologically superior society. They also help preserve the traditional arts of Japan by teaching them in their original spirit: training for the body, mind and heart.”

The wives of Japanese Buddhist priests are an interesting case. Because clergy marriage has been recognized since the fourteenth century in the Pure Land sect of Japanese Buddhism, the position of the priest’s wife is acknowledged and respected. In the Soto Zen sect, however, marriages were legalized more recently, during the Meiji era in 1872. Because celibacy is still considered the ideal, marriages were not officially acknowledged and wives were considered more like concubines. The priests’ wives cannot be buried with their husbands, as is the ordinary custom. Although the priests’ wives (*jizoku*) are essential to the running of the temples, their status is thus very ambiguous. They support their husband in his religious duties, counsel parishioners, and are very important in managing the day-to-day affairs of the temple.

It was only in 1995 that *jizokus* were accorded an official position, after the *jizokus* started to organize themselves and demand proper education and recognition of their role. “Their interest indicates a desire to establish a place for themselves as more responsible and full-fledged members of society, both in the temple and in the surrounding community.” This is not easy, because the male establishment of the Soto Zen sect is very conservative, but slowly the *jizokus* are being heard, their position is being discussed, and changes are being implemented.

Religions generally are associated with the transcendent and, for this reason, we often believe religions themselves are transcendent. But religions are nothing but the people who create them, maintain them, and practice them, along with the milieu in which they evolve. Religions generally hope to change and influence society and the individuals who compose them. But, in a way, societies exert even more influence on religions. For example, the Buddha stated that women were equal to men when it came to awakening. Thus he allowed nuns to have an equal position insofar as they could do exactly the same things as the monks: study, meditate, guide ceremonies, and teach. However, this did not stop Buddhist monks, on the whole, from being patriarchal. As the centuries passed and Buddhism went to different countries, the position of nuns changed according to the cultural mores, historical circumstances, and very patriarchal tendencies of these societies.

For these reasons, nowadays we find that the relative positions of monks and the nuns are very different in different Buddhist countries. The position of nuns is changing, because recently women being allowed to study, work, and vote. Furthermore, in most Buddhist countries Buddhist nuns and laywomen are organizing themselves better, recognizing how much they have to offer. As Buddhism comes to the West, it encounters a more egalitarian and less monastically inclined society that influences how it members practice Buddhism and live it. There are many women lay teachers in the West. They are very influential and active in spreading Buddhism, researching the historical context of Buddhist women, reinterpreting certain texts, practices, and rituals in the light of feminist views.
Although the position of Buddhist nuns is very low in Thailand, due to the modern circumstances of education and social opportunities, nuns have started to organize themselves independently of the monks and have also started programs to help other Thai women. The Sanobcitta Nun Thai Trust founded by Venerable Boonliang and Lady Dithakarnbhakdi started a program to promote education and improve the social status of women, especially in deprived areas. They recognized that women play a very important role in the community and therefore could bring about changes in the socio-economic climate. To achieve real improvements and development in their country, they recognized the need to generate greater awareness of social and ethical values at the grassroots level. They realized that the development of awareness in the heart and mind was lagging behind the accumulation of material wealth. For them, the direct cause of the breakup of families and social values in deprived rural areas was that women who were undereducated and underqualified were lured or forced into immoral lifestyles to improve the material status of themselves and their families. The two nuns wanted to see how these women could help their families economically, without compromising their integrity, by furthering their skills and education.

The Trust came into existence when the two pioneers saw that it was possible to bring about needed changes by involving Thai nuns in setting up and running training schemes for young women in rural areas. They also realized that the nuns had to be trained themselves before they would have the skills to carry out the scheme. Now nuns, sixteen years old and above, receive training in Buddhist moral discipline, oration, and meditation. They also attend classes in dressmaking, home economics, needlecraft, knitting, crochet work, flower arranging, artificial flower making, hygiene, sanitation, and first aid. One aim of the project is to promote and improve nun’s status. Another is to inspire people’s confidence in the nuns, so they can find refuge in the Buddha’s doctrine, gain confidence, and make appropriate changes to improve their status. They also want to preserve Thai culture and traditional values, and remind Thai women of their important cultural roles in society. They hope to remind future generations of mothers in Thailand of the value of Buddhist ethics.

In Taiwan, after the defeat of the Kuomintang, many Chinese retreated to the island and helped develop a very affluent society there. Recently much of this wealth has been channeled by Buddhists to improve their society and culture and help those in need in Taiwan and abroad. Venerable Cheng Yen is a Buddhist nun who started the Tzu Chi Foundation in 1966. She is the abbess of a small nunnery and the instigator of a broad program to provide medical services to all, especially the needy. Starting with five nuns and fifty cents of daily savings from thirty households, Venerable Cheng Yen has established hospitals, medical colleges, and research centers in Taiwan. The foundation also helps people struck by disasters all over the world. To this day, the nuns work daily to earn their keep and do not benefit from the enormous amount of money they raise.

Venerable Cheng Yen encourages her followers to earn money for others: to use what they need for themselves and give as much as they can of the surplus. She says that money is a tool and one must be careful not to be used by it. She explains that someone’s money will eventually fall into the hands of the government, natural disaster, thieves, war, and children, but “If we can use money to benefit humankind, the good karma created with money will stay with us forever.” With this theory she has aroused the compassion of a large number of people in Taiwan and internationally. Not only do her followers benefit others, but the religious training she advocates seems to have a profound, beneficial influence on them and those around them.

Foguangshan is a Buddhist temple situated at the southern tip of Taiwan. It is a large complex with an orphanage, kindergartens, junior high and high schools, Buddhist colleges, graduate courses for nuns and laywomen, a hospital and traveling ambulances, a retirement home, and a funeral home. Recently land was purchased to restore its ecological balance. The faith that underpins all these activities is Humanistic Buddhism, a Buddhism that is practical, of this world, and relevant to modern times. The founder is a monk, but the monastic followers who apply his ideas are mainly nuns. The retirement home was so successful at
making 120 elderly residents comfortable and gives meaning to their lives that the nuns have been asked to care for a new twelve-story retirement home being built by the provincial government.

Government inspectors were impressed by the kindness, warm family feeling, and joy that permeated the place. It was a similar situation at the Foguangshan high school. The provincial education authorities sent difficult, maladjusted children and juvenile delinquents there and found there was a remarkable transformation. There are no specific program, but the nuns think the pupils are transformed by being in an environment that is far from town in a natural setting, with kind and loving discipline.

Master Hsing Yun emphasizes living Buddhism through contact with the people instead of hiding in a small private room. This attitude is found again and again among modern Buddhists in Asia. In certain Buddhist countries, due to colonialism or Western domination, there has been a certain retrenchment of Buddhism with self-absorbed and quietist tendencies. However, with liberalization and economic self-confidence, the socially active aspects of Buddhism have come to the fore.

Huafan University was founded by the Buddhist nun, Venerable Hiu Wan, near Taipei. It is situated deep in the mountains at the end of a valley covered by Chinese pines. She started this college because she was concerned about the decline of ethical values in this technological age and thought the humanities should be incorporated into the curriculum of science and technological studies. She endeavors to develop “enlightened education” to purify the mind. The practice of ethics, understanding the perfection of wisdom, and having compassion are the principles on which the university is founded. By helping the students to purify their thoughts, she hopes they will develop compassion, see everything in their environment as valuable, and reach a true appreciation of the interdependence of things. Venerable Hiu Wan hopes that young people will plan and strive for the better development of everything in the world.

Buddhist temples in the past have been repositories of knowledge and places where ordinary people could receive an education. This has been lost recently, as state and secular education has taken over from the monasteries and nunneries. An ethical, religious education adapted to its environment and circumstances has been lost. At present there is a realization of the problems facing Asian Buddhists and efforts are being made to reverse certain trends and create the conditions for ethical and spiritual education.

Korean Buddhist history is singular in that Buddhism was repressed from 1400 to 1910, when Confucianists took over the reins of government. For many centuries, Buddhists had little influence on Korean society. Korean monks and nuns had to stay in the mountains and many restrictions were put on them. Since the 1900s, there has been a slow revival of Buddhism, especially after the end of the Korean War and also since Korea has become economically successful.

Venerable Tokwang Sunim is an herbalist and a traditional medical doctor who has a practice in Seoul. She became a doctor because halfway through her Buddhist studies she became very ill. This made her interested in illnesses and she studied Oriental medicine for six years. She is also learning counseling and Buddhist psychology to help relieve the mental suffering of her patients. Being a nun, one of her vows is not to touch men. However, she treats both men and women without discrimination. She says that she does it with the mind of a doctor who only sees a patient in pain, out of compassion. She is not just a medical doctor dealing with physical pain but also a spiritual doctor. She tries to show her patients how their habits and desires may contribute to their illnesses. She encourages them to cultivate wisdom and an understanding of life and the causes of illnesses. She often recommends spiritual exercises together with taking certain medicines.

There is a historical trend of Buddhism towards adaptability to circumstances and environment. Rules and precepts are considered important, but so is the spirit of them. It is accepted that compassionate activities and positive results may lead one to contravene the letter of the precepts. Buddhist nuns are part of this movement of adaptation that Buddhism is undergoing as it encounters the different circumstances of modern times.
Kwangou Sunim is a senior nun in charge of a large leisure center in the suburbs of Seoul, Korea, built for diverse educational activities such as swimming and drama. There are also audio rooms to learn English. Before becoming the director of this leisure center, Kwangou Sunim created a temple in Seoul to teach Buddhism in a way that would fit with modern times. She felt that Buddhism needed to respond to the demands and conditions of ordinary people, so she started Sunday meetings and children’s groups. She publishes a small Buddhist magazine dedicated to the family as a whole and sends it free to people in prisons. She believes that, as a Buddhist, one must do bodhisattva actions and cultivate one’s life while teaching and transforming others.

When the city council built a recreation center in Mokdong, a suburb of Seoul, they decided to give it to the Buddhist Chogye Order to help the youth of this suburb. The order thought that nuns would be better at guiding and helping the youth. Kwangou Sunim was elected director of this center by the Korean Bhikkhu Association. She told me that people really enjoyed the youth center because there were so many activities at very low fees. They can learn music, calligraphy, English, oral narration of fairy tales, painting, yoga, Buddhist śūtra study, and traditional arts like tea ceremony, traditional dances, counseling, etc. There are 28 different types of activities in the program.

Senior citizens can use the center free of charge. They can come twice a week to learn swimming, which helps them relax. They come back much happier to their families living stressful lives in high-rise buildings nearby. In the beginning Kwangou Sunim took over the center reluctantly. Now she realizes that Buddhists need to create environments where people can satisfy their secular interests at the same time that they benefit from a Buddhist presence. She envisages more leisure centers like this one, run by Buddhist nuns, all over Korea.

Venerable Pomyong has been a nun since she was five years old. It is a Buddhist tradition in Korea that if a child is very ill, she is taken to live in a Buddhist temple in hopes she will recover. Pomyong Sunim recovered and decided to remain a nun. Although she is a meditation nun, recently she has taken to teaching flower arrangement to laywomen. She realized that many women are at a stage in life when they feel lost and without purpose because their children have left home. In her class she teaches flower arrangement and also meditation for peace and clarity of mind. At the end of the class, some women take the opportunity for private counseling. Because she is a Buddhist nun, they feel safe with her. They talk freely with her about the difficulties in their lives, which makes them feel fresher and lighter.

This Korean nun is mixing meditation, creativity, and counseling. Buddhists often regard Buddhism not as a religion with fixed beliefs, but more as a way of life where practices, ethics, and wisdom affect all aspects of their lives. In this more individuated modern world, more and more people in Asia and the West are cultivating Buddhism in this way, leading them to what could be called “meditative creative social involvement”.

Pang Kwihi, a Korean woman who is handicapped and in a wheelchair, is a successful novelist, Buddhist lecturer, and scriptwriter. Originally she wanted to become a doctor, but in the 70s it was difficult for handicapped people in Korea to go to university. The only university who accepted her was Dongguk Buddhist University. She started to study Buddhism by attending this university. She realized that its philosophy could be very helpful to her and became attracted to its religious practices. She wrote a thesis on Social Buddhist Welfare and, in the course of time, was asked to give Buddhist lectures, especially to handicapped people.

She realized that physically handicapped people could easily write, since they often spent time by themselves immobilized. She created a magazine to publish writings by handicapped people and also arranged activities that would inspire them. She is dedicated to researching stories about handicapped people in the śūtras to show that they were remembered and supported by the Buddha himself. She wants to remove the tendency to view Buddhism as being just about karma and past lives, which is an unendurable burden for handicapped people.
Pang Kwihi’s work resembles that of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in India. Dr. Ambedkar advocated that his people, known as “untouchables,” convert to Buddhism to escape the caste system. One of the Buddha’s revolutionary acts was to allow anyone, regardless of caste, to join his monastic communities 2500 years ago in India. However, Dr. Ambedkar felt he had to reinterpret some of the tenets of Buddhism to more fully help his followers. He regarded suffering as being caused not so much by inner greed, hatred, and delusion as by social greed, hatred, and delusion. He reflected on omitting, or at least reducing, the emphasis on karma and rebirth. He reinterpreted Buddhism to suit the circumstances and needs of the people whose dire situation he was addressing.

NOTES


Buddhism in Kinnaur and in the Lives Of Kinnauri Women

*Tenzin Norzin*

The Kinnaur region of India is in the mountainous northern state of Himachal Pradesh. The population of Kinnaur is around 70,000. More than half the population is Buddhist.

Kinnaur is a beautiful region, which in the past was famous for its Buddhist scholars and practitioners, both female and male. One of the most well known was Khunu Lama Rinpoche, Tenzin GyaltSEN. Khunu Lama was highly praised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama as a living Buddha. In fact, the Dalai Lama received the explanation and transmission of Shantideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* from Khunu Lama. There was another famous man from this region, named Khunu Babu Tharchin. In the 1930’s he established the first Tibetan newspaper, called *The Mirror News*. He printed and published this newspaper in Kalimpong in an attempt to inform and unify the Buddhist regions of the Himalayas. Kinnaur is also acclaimed as the place where many famous Tibetan astrologers were born. These days many of the calendars that Tibetans rely on for important information about such things as the weather and auspicious religious days come from Kinnaur.

In Kinnaur, women are particularly religious and very devout Buddhists. Recently a nun named Tseten Moni, from Sibilo village in Kinnaur, passed away in the region. She was known to be a great practitioner and very highly realized. She was considered to have made great spiritual progress, but because Kinnaur is quite isolated, not many people have heard of her achievements.

Kinnaur is an area of simple villages and subsistence living. Many apples and apricots are grown there and sold in northern India. In the past, men used to have the opportunity to go to school and to study, but women were denied the right to education. They mainly worked as housewives and farmers in the fields. In recent times, however, both men and women have been given the same right to be educated and to apply for jobs in many fields. As a result, there are many female doctors, teachers, and other professionals. Due to their dedication to study, many more women are becoming educated and aiming to get good jobs.

Kinnaur has a very strong historical, religious, and cultural connection to Tibet. Prior to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, many learned lamas used to travel to Tibet to receive teachings and initiations from Tibetan monasteries. These days, however, due to the growth of Hinduism, the Buddhist tradition is facing many difficulties in Kinnaur. Because of its isolation, busy teachers and lamas have sometimes ignored the region. Unless these capable scholars and teachers help preserve and transmit the teachings, there is a possibility that Buddhism in Kinnaur will face extinction.

Fortunately, due to the kindness and dedicated support of Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, the nuns have been able to study very seriously and put into practice whatever they have learned. At present, fourteen nuns from Kinnaur are studying at Jamyang Choling Institute in Dharamsala. Five of them have already studied Buddhism for more than fifteen years and are considered very advanced in their studies. They have started to study the Abhidharma, or metaphysics, this year and will complete the course in the year 2006. After that, they will receive teachings on the Vinaya. They have only about four or five years left to attain...
the highest degree in Buddhist philosophy, which is equivalent to a doctorate, and the junior classes are following their lead. We have great hopes and big dreams that we, the Kinnauri nuns who are studying in Dharamsala, Mundgod, and Nepal, will return upon completion of our studies and share our knowledge of the Dharma with the needy younger nuns in the region of Kinnaur, so that our cultural heritage will not be totally lost.

Something His Holiness the Dalai Lama said has a special relevance for Kinnaur. His Holiness said that it is of special importance to preserve the Buddhadharma in places where historically it has flourished, for instance, in Mongolia. Please bear in mind that this is also the situation in Kinnaur.
Buddhist Women in Zangskar

Chopa Tenzin Lhadron

Zangskar valley, a sub-district of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir, is situated in the northern region of the Indian Himalayas. Until its absorption into the state of Jammu and Kashmir on August 15, 1947, Zangskar and Ladakh were two small kingdoms that shared and contributed to the wider Tibetan Buddhist culture and religion for centuries. Roughly 95 percent of the population is Buddhist with a small number of Muslims. Due to the extreme harsh climate, remote location, and rugged terrain, the heavy winter snows cut Zangskar off from the rest of the world for almost eight months of the year, during which time the roads and footpaths are impossible to travel.

Role of Women in Zangskar

In the tiny remote villages of the Zangskar valley, Buddhist women, in general, and nuns, in particular, are quietly practicing the teachings of Lord Buddha. Many women have achieved high realization. The first spiritual teachers in the homes are mothers, who play a very important role in raising children with proper Buddhist values. Even though many of these women are illiterate, they are true teachers of peace. They have learned many prayers and mantras by memory and, as soon as children are able to talk, their mothers teach them prayers and recitations, such as the praise and mantra of Chenrezig (Sanskrit: Avalokiteshvara), the Buddha of Compassion. Children learn from the mothers how to prostrate and pay respect to the representations of the Three Jewels and how to care for the elderly, young, and needy in the community. The spirit of loving-kindness and compassion can truly be found in women’s lives in Zangskar.

In my family my mother is a very religious person. When I was young, she taught me many basic Buddhist prayers and mantras of different deities, such as the praise of Jampelyang (Skt.: Maṇjuśrī), the Buddha of Wisdom, to sharpen my mind. She woke us up early in the morning and had us do our prayers. This is the same in every family in Zangskar. People often say that a mother is a true Buddha who brings up her children with a solid foundation of good morality. As we can see, in many societies in the modern world these values are rarely seen.

In recent years, Buddhist women in Zangskar have been actively involved in the work of creating women’s alliances (ama’i tsogpa) in the villages. These associations have reconstructed sacred monuments, such as stupas, temples, mani stones (rocks and slates engraved with the mantra of Avalokiteshvara – Om mani padma hung), and so on. These activities may be limited to the external sphere, but they play an important role in helping preserve traditional values for the younger generation. Young people are in danger of losing these values due to many changes in society in the name of modernization and due to a lack of proper understanding of their own culture. This role of preserving culture is essential and women are working diligently to pass traditional values on to the next generation as best they can.

Here I wish to clarify that the people of Zangskar are not against social change and development, since progress is necessary for our communities. The point I wish to make that, in conjunction with material
progress, the people of our region urgently need to promote our own traditional and cultural values through a proper educational system. Above all, we need to reach out to the general public and raise awareness about the importance of Buddhist education for our children, particularly girls, if we are to improve the educational standard of our people and society.

Despite the importance of preserving Buddhist culture and religion, however, a serious lack of educational opportunities means that women rarely appear as spiritual leaders or teachers in public. Women and girls are often kept at home to take care of the family, so society generally considers education not essential or irrelevant for women.

Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo has developed various educational programs in Zangskar. For example, she started educational programs at Jangchub Chöling Monastery in Zangla Village and Khachö Drubling (Jujika Zhal) Nunnery in Karsha Village. In addition to education programs in Zangskar, she founded similar programs in other parts of the Indian Himalayas, such as Kinnaur and Spiti. These projects provide young women with a Buddhist education, including meditation, ritual practices, health care training, and so on.

Initially, in 1988, Ven. Lekshe Tsomo founded Jamyang Choling Institute in Dharamsala, close to the residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet. The purpose of this institute is to provide a full-time Buddhist education program in philosophy, logic, and other subjects for nuns from the Himalayan regions of India, Nepal, Bhutan, and so on. These programs provide a comprehensive spiritual and secular education for Himalayan nuns and laywomen, training them as mediators, teachers, mentors, and community workers.

Many young nuns from Zangskar, including myself, are receiving an excellent educational opportunity at Jamyang Choling. This is solely due to the dedication and accomplishments of the monastery’s founder. Upon completion of our studies, when we return to our home areas, we shall share our knowledge of the Dharma and languages such as Tibetan, Hindi, and English with our younger nun sisters. This is the main dream of our spiritual guru, His Holiness 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet, as well as Ven. Lekshe Tsomo. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has given his blessings to our project and his full support to the Buddhist nuns’ communities in the Himalayan region. He often visits and gives teachings all over the Himalayan region, which greatly encourages the people, especially the monastics, to study the core teaching of Buddha Shakyamuni and thereby continue their contributions to the Buddhist community at large. I personally feel that we have a great responsibility to exert great effort to preserve our unique cultural heritage in the remote Himalayan region where it is declining at an alarmingly dangerous rate under the negative influences of modernization.

In many cases the women and nuns of Zangskar face great educational hardships. Buddhist nuns are respected as monastics and as Sangha, but due to a lack of proper religious facilities available at the old existing nunneries, nuns are often seen working as field laborers for their families and relatives instead of studying and devoting themselves to the proper practice of the Dharma. There are few material resources in Zangskar, due to the high altitude and extremely poor soil conditions.

In the year 2001, I had the opportunity to accompany two staff members of the Ladakh Nuns Association as they conducted a survey of eight nunneries in Zangskar. I was really saddened to see these nuns who were anxious to learn and practice the Dharma by fully understanding it. Owing to their difficult circumstances, they lacked even the basic housing and other living facilities to accommodate qualified teachers. As in Ladakh and other Himalayan areas, tsampa (roasted barley) and butter tea are the main staple foods that provide our livelihood. Lay women often request the female Sangha to do prayers for them, give them advice and support when they face problems, for example, when a family member dies. Winter is the best time for people in Zangskar to concentrate on Buddhist meditation, reading sacred scriptures, and telling religious stories to their children. Almost every winter, people gather at the small temples in their villages
and do an open retreat in which they recite the mantra of Chenrezig – *Om mani padme hung* – a hundred million times or more.

Buddhist women in Zangskar and other regions of the Himalayas wish to express our deep and heartfelt gratitude to Ven. Lekshe Tsomo for her undaunted courage and dedication in helping uplift and enlighten Buddhist women in the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere through her tireless work of educating young women. We are also very grateful for the opportunity to attend the historic Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women being held throughout the world to create sisterhood based on the Buddhadharma.
After the democratic change took place in 1990 and Buddhists regained the right to practice their faith in Mongolia, the hidden devotion of the people was revealed. Since then, many old and new monasteries were opened and began to function. Gandantegchenlin Monastery, which was the only functioning monastery during the socialist regime, restored its other temples, such as Dashi-Choirimpil, Idgaa-Chojjinlin, and Gunga-Choillin.

Moreover, when ancient and historical monasteries like Amarbayasgalant and Dambadarjaa reopened, our Tugs Bayasgalant Center (Heaven of Joy) Mongolian Buddhist Women’s Center was established at the same time. The center began its religious activities with the support and appreciation of many organizations: Gandantegchinlen Monastery, Dashichoilin Monastery, the Association of Mongolian Women, the Association of Mongolian Worshipers, the Mongolian Ministry of Law, and others. Tugs Bayasgalant Center was the first Buddhist Women’s Center in Mongolia established during the democratic changes. This was followed by many other temples for women, such as Narakhajid Monastery, Tara Monastery, Phadma Sambhava Monastery, and Dijid-Choirimplin Monastery. Among these, today only Narakhajid Monastery has managed to continue.

Before the founding of our Tugs Bayasgalant Center and after her participation in the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Ladakh, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo asked Mongolian representatives why no Buddhist women from Mongolia took part in the conference. Did Mongolian women have the freedom to practice Buddhism? Later, this conversation greatly influenced Gandantegchenlin Monastery, the center of Mongolian Buddhism, and motivated the monastery to support our center.

The rights of equality for women and the freedom of worship are clearly ensured in the Constitution of Mongolia. From my observations, most of the worshipers who go for refuge to monasteries and temples are women. Perhaps this is because women are compassionate by nature, desiring to free all sentient beings, including their children and husbands, from any possible sufferings.

Since the establishment of our Tugs Bayasgalant Center, we have been developing and extending our activities significantly. Today, the center has become a self-sufficient organization. We have good relations with various international organizations, as well as good relations with Mongolian organizations. The eminent Buddhist scholar and Dharma teacher Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, who was the extraordinary Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, led us to the Dharma path and noble deeds. Due to the generous sponsorship of Guru Dava Rinpoche, the highest reincarnate lama in Mongolia, we have completed the construction of our monastery. I am grateful to my Dharma teacher Guru Dava Rinpoche, who is now 96 years old, of sound mind, and still supporting his women disciples.

In order to educate the nuns of our monastery, we have sent three nuns to India. They returned with deep knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and are working for the center now. Another nun is studying in Seoul, South Korea. In addition, other nuns from our center are studying Buddhist philosophy and Indo-Tibetan studies at the Zanabazar Buddhist University in Ulaan Bataar. The first students will graduate in 2006 with
bachelor’s degrees in Tibetan Studies and Buddhist Philosophy.

The Tibet Foundation in the U.K., especially due to the great diligence of Sue Byrne, contributed greatly to the implementation of this education project. Under the auspices of this project, four Russian nuns are now studying in Mongolia.

The Mongolian government respects Buddhism, which is the country’s traditional religion. The President of Mongolia receives the heads of Buddhist monasteries once a year and shares his views and advice with them. Buddhism still faces many challenges, however.

In recent years, due to the opportunities provided by freedom of worship, Christianity has spread all over Mongolia. With the help of a great deal of foreign investment, many Christian churches have opened. As a result, the Mongolian government has imposed a tax of 20 percent on all religious organizations. Unfortunately, it is no secret that this measure has negatively affected the economy of the Buddhist temples and their development.

We, the Mongolian Buddhist Women, hear the bad news of losses and damage in the Middle East, in Iraq and other countries, through press reports in the media, with deep regret and offer our prayers for the well-being of humankind. We are also concerned about the loss of ecological balance. It is evident that the world is facing a number of natural disasters resulting from the injurious actions of human beings, which are drastically affecting the ecological balance and causing great losses. We think that it is important for all religious organizations to work for environmental protection. These are just of few of the ways Buddhist women can contribute to peace and happiness in the world.
The History of a Buddhist Women’s Datsan in Buryatia

Zorigma Budaeva

The history of the building of the Buddhist women’s datsan (Buddhist temple), called Zungon Darjaling, is connected with His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. In 1992, during his trip in Buryatia, when meeting with people active in religious organizations, His Holiness advised that a Buddhist women’s temple be created for preserving peace and harmony among the people of Buryatia.

Only one woman was at the meeting – the leader of the United Buddhists, by the name of Darima Tsingyeva Sambuevna. It seemed that His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s words were addressed to her. Soon after this event, a married couple named Darima Tsingyeva and Budaev Dalai decided to begin building a Buddhist women’s temple. A great number of people and organizations took part in building Zungon Darjaling, but the building became possible only thanks to the aspirations, persistence, and determination of two people: Darima Tsingyeva and Budaev Dalai.

Darima summoned her courage and went to get advice from Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, the Indian Ambassador to Mongolia, who advised her to build a new temple. The leadership of the city and republic supported this undertaking, but did not provide the means. So, the family decided to sell their house. In 1995, the administration of the city gave a plot of land for building the Buddhist women’s datsan.

This year, the lamas of two Buddhist organizations, Lamrim and Dharma, arranged for a consecration ceremony at the land and the rite of laying a sacred vessel, known as a bumba. After selling his property, Dalai Anpilovich began to build two small buildings on the land. The government and several enterprises gave financial help for the main construction.

In 1998 the first dugan (a small house for praying) was built. In 1999, several Buryat girls and women received the status of gènyenma (lay Buddhist precepts) from the Ven. Yéshe Lodro Rinpoche. He also gave the name of the temple, Zungon Darjaling, which means “noble and prosperous.”

Since that time, the temple began to hold daily prayer services (chural) for the well-being of all beings and for the prosperity of our motherland. Astrologers, lamas, and embe (doctors) from Mongolia are also invited. Thus, the activities of Zungon Darjaling Temple began for the prosperity of all creatures.

In 1999, in Moscow the ambassador of Burma, His Excellency U. Khin Newnt, advised Darima Sambuevna to build a stupa (suburgan) and provided the means to do so. On January 31, 1999, His Excellency came to Buryatia to consecrate the stupa and gave his family’s religious valuables as a gift, which were placed in the stupa.

His Excellency U. Khin Newnt put sacred relics – particles of blood and a piece of the bone of Buddha – along with a statue of the Buddha into the stupa, which is situated on the grounds of the Buddhist women’s temple. In the freezing frost, he prayed for almost four hours. He prayed and created a connection with the place and space. The stupa was called The Sovereign of the Universe.

The official opening of the main building took place on July 1, 2000. Realizing the importance of this event, a great number of enthusiastic people took part and not only religious people. All of them helped actively in the construction of the buildings.
In 2001, the main statue of Buddha Shakyamuni, sent from St. Petersburg, was consecrated. The history of the statue is connected with Agvan Dorzhiev, who brought it from Tibet in 1913. It was in poor condition, and the precious stones and external decorations had been taken from it.

The leadership of the temple did its best to reconstruct the statue of the Buddha. The hands and the head were reconstructed and the inner substances of the statue was prepared, which consisted of 45 thousand sheets of paper with 27 different mantras, 65 kg of incense and cereals, and 9 different jewels (erdeny). Ven. Yeshe Lodoi Rinpoche presided over the consecration of the statue.

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The main difference between Zungon Darjaling and other temples in Russia is that female lamas perform the prayers. In Darima’s opinion, only a woman can understand women; women prefer to ask advice and discuss their inner life with a woman, because some things are difficult to discuss with a male lama.

Another important fact in the history of the Zungon Darjaling Temple is that a stupa was built on the beach of Lake Baikal. In the village of Maksimikha, a branch of the Buddhist women’s center has opened for preserving Lake Baikal. This center, which is called “the sacred jewel of the planet,” is open only in summer.

**Sunday School Education at Zungon Darjaling Temple in Buryatia**

After 70 years of religious repression, sociopolitical changes in Russia have been beneficial for the revival of spiritual traditions, including the development of Buddhism. A bright example is the emergence of a Buddhist temple for women. In Buryatia, traditionally only men’s temples existed; therefore the attitudes toward and relations with female devotees were ambiguous. The problem is also that the majority of the population does not aspire to self-improvement, and so faith in Buddhism is limited to practical applications like performing religious rituals and making prayers for deciding personal questions. In this connection, there is a great need for spiritual education.

Two years ago, we opened a Sunday School at the temple. But it is necessary to emphasize that the school is not simply secular. Its basic purpose is the spiritual and moral education of future generations, through acquaintance with the ethical teachings of Buddhism. For this purpose, we developed an education program that provides three years of training. The basic subjects are the foundations of Buddhist philosophy, the foundations of Buddhist practice, and Buryat national traditions. Within a half year, we trained children from seven to nine years old in these subjects.

The educational process was directed toward imparting a knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and the skills for children to put it into practice. Pupils were acquainted with biographies and learned about the Three Jewels of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths, and the wheel of life. The greatest interest among the pupils was raised by practical occupations related to: (1) religious symbolism in temple art and architecture; (2) prayer drums and the significance of circumambulating the temple (goroo); (3) the stupa and its value; (4) rules of behavior in the temple; (5) the internal arrangement of the temple; (6) religious practice; (7) the mandala and its significance; (8) the practice of offering donations; and (9) acquaintance with religious images.

The study of Buryat traditions is the result of a revival of interest in national and cultural traditions that were lost. The program of study that prepares students for employment consists of three sections: (1) the person and the spiritual world, (2) the person and other people, and (3) the person and the environment. The first section acquaints children with the alphabet of morals, the biographies of outstanding people of Buryatia, and the ethical standards of Buddhism. The second section promotes the formation of moral behavior in relation to other people, and is basically concerned with questions of etiquette. The third section is directed at the formation of beneficial attitudes in relation to the world around. Within this framework, the following themes are understood: the person and nature, national holidays, Buryat proverbs and sayings, national dress, and Buryat national foods.
Children attend the lessons with great pleasure and carry out the learning tasks. However, a lack of teaching aids complicates the training process, as some pupils need to repeat the teaching materials over again. This initial experience has revealed the necessity of developing teaching manuals in these subjects. During this time we have been engaged in developing programs and manuals in these subjects.

At present, manuals for the first two years of training in the foundations of Buddhist philosophy have been developed in accordance with the education program. The manual for first-year pupils consists of three chapters: (1) Life Story of the Buddha; (3) The Three Jewels of Buddhism, and (3) The Wheel of Life. The life story of the Buddha is examined, which opens up discussion on such concepts as the Three Jewels, the Four Noble Truths, the wheel of life, and the law of dependent arising.

For pupils of the second year of training the manual consists of three chapters: (1) Foundations of Buddhist Philosophy; (2) Buddhist Theories of Knowledge; and (3) Buddhist Ethics or Moral Theory. By studying the topics in this manual, pupils become more deeply acquainted with the law of interdependence and interconditionality, become acquainted with the Buddhist worldview, the law of cause and effect (the concept of karma), the foundations of the Buddhist theory of knowledge, the concepts of ultimate and relative truth, and Buddhist ethics in more detail.

These textbooks have just been developed and prepared for publication, so no information about the results of their practical application is available yet. Our school began to operate at the end of September 2004. With sincere determination, the Sunday school project is growing and enriching the lives of children in Buryatia.
The Quiet Movement of Buddhist Women in Cambodia

Peou Vanna

Generally, Cambodian nuns observe eight or ten Buddhist precepts. They shave their hair and eyebrows. They may wear white robes or dress in a white blouse and black skirt. Some nuns live in pagodas, while others live at their homes with support from their children.

Typically, Cambodian nuns and laywomen think primarily of serving monks by cooking meals for them, cleaning the area around the pagoda, and so forth. In addition, they may take care of other duties, such as looking after the homes of their children, babysitting grandchildren, or doing other household chores that keep them busy far beyond a usual day of work. In spite of taking care of all these difficult tasks, women are often criticized for being unable to get away from the kitchen. It is a fact that nuns, as well as laywomen, are so busy serving the monks and other people in their entourage that they do not have much time to think of themselves in the same way that monks and men do when they practice or learn the Dharma.

A new development or quiet movement came into existence in 1995 when a group of 107 Buddhist women from all over Cambodia gathered to push for the establishment of an association known as the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia, which restricted its membership to Buddhist women. The association was born following a four-day regional conference, held from May 1 to 4, 1995, on the theme “Roles of Cambodian Nuns and Laywomen in National Reconciliation.” This conference was held at the Cultural and Meditation Center at Prek Ho in Kandal province and attended by distinguished national and international guests from Thailand, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Germany.

The Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia promotes the rights of Cambodian nuns and laywomen and encourages them to change their stance from cooking and cleaning pagodas and not daring to take part in society to becoming counselors and teachers of Dharma who take part in meditation, community development, conflict resolution, and conflict management among people in their communities, especially in remote areas where information networks do not exist. They can learn Dharma and practice meditation to attain a peaceful mind. Another religious activity of the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia (ANLC) is to preserve and promote Buddhism by keeping the Buddha’s prohibitions and permissions, by training Buddhist followers and helping them become well informed about both Buddhism and secular affairs.

These activities constitute a quiet movement of Cambodian Buddhist women who have walked and are walking slowly towards equal rights and gender equity and promoting the equal rights of women within the realm of Buddhism as well as in the secular environment. Despite nearly a decade of effort put forth by the quiet movement of Cambodian Buddhist women, Cambodian nuns who observe the ten precepts have yet to be allowed to become samānerī (novice nuns) or bhikkhunī (fully ordained nuns).

Currently ANLC has 10,825 members; of these, 65 percent are nuns and 35 percent are laywomen. Among the nuns, 90 percent are over 55 years of age, and 20 percent are from 30 to 50. Most of the laywomen do not live at a pagoda as nuns do; they live in their own homes. Of the laywomen, 75 percent are over 50 years of age, and 25 percent are from 29 to 50.
The level of education of most nuns is still low, but they have a wealth of experience in life, because they have lived through many different regimes and especially because they lived through decades of prolonged war and strife. They are seen to be morally strong, dynamic, decisive, and fearless in overcoming any problems they encounter. With their meditation practice, they are calm and firm and have leadership qualifications. It is observed that most of the nuns are mature in their thinking, well-disciplined, and have a high sense of responsibility in relation to the many young novice monks who lack education.

The practices that the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia adopted since 1995 include learning and training in the Dharma, self-development, peaceful mental development, leadership, human rights, promotion of women’s rights, conflict resolution, elimination of domestic violence, and care for patients living with AIDS.

So far, the nuns and laywomen who are trainers in the association have provided training on how to meditate, cultivate a peaceful mind, and provide counseling to people in crisis, homeless children, and sex workers. They have educated children to understand the meaning of the five precepts and other Buddhist teachings.

At present, the local people have to some extent recognized Cambodian nuns. They usually invite nuns to participate in funerals and other religious ceremonies just as they invite monks. Moreover, on every fasting day, His Majesty the King always invites the monks as well as at least five nuns to join him in listening to the Dharma teaching in the Royal Palace.

Besides their basic daily activities, Cambodian nuns and laywomen are expanding networks at the international level with other countries around the world. For instance, every two years, Buddhist women around the world gather to hold an international conference on Buddhist Women, called Sakyadhita (“Daughters of the Buddha”). Daughters of the Buddha from around the world gather to debate and exchange ideas about Buddhist issues in connection with the current conditions of society. They have spared no efforts to work together to solve various problems the world is facing, both in relation to Buddhism and to secular affairs. Since 1995 the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia has regularly dispatched representatives to attend the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women.

There is another international conference called INEB (International Network of Engaged Buddhists,” whose activities focus on participation to promote Buddhism around the world. This conference aims to promote Buddhism around the world to contribute to common solutions and genuine peace for humankind the world over.

These international networks provide crucial advantages for all participants, particularly the members of the Association of Nuns and Laywomen of Cambodia. Like brilliant sunlight, these networks help the Cambodian nuns and laywomen to see more clearly the situation of Buddhism in various geographical locations around the world.

Buddhism has spread all over the world and the practice of Buddhism in each country varies depending on the culture and resources of that country. But generally Buddhist followers all over the world share a common goal: to find spiritual tranquility and peace for humankind throughout the world.

This religious goal responds to the current situation of Cambodia, where people are encountering many problems, such as a decline in social decency and morality and an upsurge in violence of many kinds, such as domestic violence, theft, robbery, killing, and so on. These acts are completely contrary to the five precepts of the Buddha, which aim to lead people to a peaceful state.

Linked with problems currently facing our country, the quiet movement of Buddhist women followers and supporters is carrying out its mission to contribute to society by reducing violence and tackling the decline in social decency and morality, working towards national reconciliation through the development of a peaceful mind, meditation, and promotion of the five precepts. These methods can be used to help resolve disputes among nuns, laymen, laywomen, students, and other people in the communities, so they
can achieve peace for themselves and for society as a whole. A peaceful mind is an effective medicine to heal conflicts of every nature.

May the whole world live in peace.
A Woman’s Place is in the Home: 
Master Yinkuang’s Letters on Women and Childrearing

I-li Yang

Women have long been disadvantaged and under-privileged in many cultures and societies.¹ Men are usually dominant and women are the dominated, surrendering themselves as demanded by customs and conventions. In traditional Chinese society, for example, women are expected to conform to the “three obediences and the four virtues.” Scarcely do we Chinese regard any women as “powerful,” except historical figures like Empress Wu (625-705) of the Tang Dynasty or Empress Dowager Tzu-hsi (1835-1908) of the Ching Dynasty, some of whom were despised. Women simply cannot be powerful, in most people’s eyes. The 13th Patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism of China, Master Yinkuang (1861-1940), wrote about women and power.² He claimed that women had power, and if women could exercise their power well, they could help create a peaceful world.

This paper presents a view of women as the most powerful and influential people in the family, as envisioned by Master Yinkuang. The Master gave specific suggestions and rationale for how women should exercise their power. This paper addresses the questions: (1) What kinds of powers did women have, in Master Yinkuang’s view? (2) How did he suggest women should put their powers to use? This paper is organized into four sections. Section 1 gives a brief biographical sketch of Master Yinkuang. Section 2 discusses the basics of his teachings. Section 3 provides answers to the questions posed above. Section 4 summarizes the implications derived from his view.

A Brief Biographical Note on Master Yinkuang

Master Yinkuang was born in a small village in Shansi in 1861. He was taught by his eldest brother to excel in the rational or Neo-Confucian philosophy of the Sung and Ming Periods. After being sick for some time during his late teens, he decided to become a monk in 1881, at the age of 21. He stayed at a number of different places and had a chance to browse through the Sūtra-pitaka, especially those texts related to the Pure Land thought.

The master practiced asceticism, living a very simple life, strictly observing the precepts, and closely performing Pure Land practices, especially reciting the name of Amitābha. He was one of the few people in modern China that had achieved samādhi (single-pointed concentration) through such practices. He never owned a temple, nor took any monks to be his disciples, as he had vowed not to.³ His honest and upright character was highly extolled and this was probably the most important factor that drew people to him.

The master remained inactive for some time until he was 52. In 1912, after 30 years of solitary and austere self-discipline, some of his letters were published in the Buddhist Magazine of Shanghai, under the pseudonym of “The Always Ashamed.” In 1917, his name “Yinkuang” first appeared when three of his
letters were published as a small booklet of just 8 pages, and in 1918 his first book, formally entitled *Master Yinkuang’s Writings*, was published. From then on, he began to be known as “the Great Master Yinkuang.”

By the time he died in 1940, he had written more than 600 letters, plus a number of other writings – prefaces, postscripts, recounts, and so forth – totaling over one million words. Although he did not write large treatises (*śastras*) or comments on Buddhist *sūtras*, his writings were the best notes ever written – notes that people could easily understand and follow in their every day lives.

His writing – a true reflection of his very personality and religious practice – was always sincere and honest, direct and outspoken, guileless and earnest. His words pounded directly into the hearts of people of all walks of life, from intellectuals to peasants, from celebrities to housewives, from governors to generals. His influence spread far and wide. It was through his writings that the Pure Land teachings were invigorated again at a difficult time when China was torn between internal troubles and multiple sources of external oppression, when traditional systems and values were on the verge of bankruptcy and Western influences charged in.

The Basics of the Master’s Teachings

At this difficult time, the master had to teach Buddhism in a very different way. Instead of lecturing totally on Buddhist supramundane doctrines as other Buddhist masters did, he made a great effort to teach in an ordinary way, based on classical Confucianism. Classical Confucianism differs drastically from Neo-Confucianism. The latter raises the issue of the mind to a metaphysical level, leaving behind the idea that one can discipline oneself to be sagacious and virtuous. The former, however, appraises virtues and ethics as the basis on which a society can maintain order and peace. It proposes eight steps as the key to self-fulfillment as well as national prosperity and world peace. Additionally, it implicitly assumes the principle of causation and retribution, constantly encouraging people to perform good deeds and refrain from unwholesome deeds.

In Master Yinkuang’s opinion, it was Neo-Confucianism that gradually corrupted and weakened China. He pointed out that under the influence of Neo-Confucianism people studied classics, not with a view to becoming sages, but for the purpose of gaining personal benefits – fame, position, and wealth. Furthermore, without any sense of causation and retribution, people became mean and selfish, leading the nation to ruin. He proposed the following measures as the antidote to this pathetic situation:

1. At the present time, the only measure to save the nation is to emphasize the principle of causality and retribution, and to promote family education.
2. The principle of causality and retribution, and family education are the dharma wheels for world peace.

The relation between the principle of causality, retribution, and family education was further specified as follows:

- Family education is the basis for social stability, and the principle of causality and retribution the key to the regulation of the mind.

The principle of causality and retribution was viewed as even far more important in that it can help both the ordinary and the intelligent. With its help, family education could benefit all, rather than just the intelligent. This is why Master Yinkuang described it as having “great powers.” It was exactly on the same footing that women were said to have “powers.”
Master Yinkuang’s View on Women’s Powers

What kind of powers do women have? In Master Yinkuang’s view, the “powers” were actually “natural duties,” obligations women should perform at home. He wrote:

To assist their husbands and educate their children are women's natural duties. In such duties lie great powers.9

It is in educating children that women have much greater powers than men because women can wield their powers quietly and incessantly."10

As children are always close to their mothers, they learn from their mothers in developing their character.11

How, then, can “duties” become “powers”? In the last two quotes above, he supplied an answer: because women are close to their children, they can wield their power quietly and incessantly. This issue requires further exploration.

First, “power” implies “control.” As mothers are often the ones in the house that know everything that happens there, they have full control over many things, especially in raising their children. During the course of childrearing, they make their own decisions, from food and clothing to teaching and coaching, not only by means of words but also by actions. It is in this sense that women's power, as defined by Master Yinkuang, should be understood. If we stop for a moment and compare a mother’s implicit and continuous teaching with that of a school teacher whose influence is explicit but temporary, it is not difficult to understand his reasoning.

Furthermore, “power” implies “influence.” As delineated by Master Yinkuang, the influences women exert are enormous and infinite. First, in his view, women could help their husbands and children become virtuous and able. He wrote:

If a person has a virtuous mother when he is a child, and a virtuous wife after he grows up, it’s difficult not to be a virtuous person himself. This is the key to a peaceful and prosperous nation.12

If a person is immersed in the virtues of his mother as a child, he will be good by himself in desperate circumstances, and perfect the world when he holds office.13

Second, he viewed such effects as extending across to other members in the family, to in-laws and cousins, and down to their descendants – children and grandchildren.

If sons and daughters are virtuous, then brothers, sisters, sister-in-laws, and grandchildren can all follow the example and become virtuous. Hereafter, the virtuous beget the virtuous, and then the world will be filled with more virtuous people than vicious ones. That’s why I say the basis for national peace and social prosperity lies in the education of one’s offspring.14

In other words, while he viewed women’s roles as traditional and confined to that of wives and mothers, he viewed women’s influences as both wide and deep, traversing the whole household and down to their descendants. Thus, in his view, women’s influences can be infinite, passing from one person to another, from one generation to another, from one family to another, and so on. Thus, “power” should be understood in terms of the contributions women were likely to make, that is, in roles that were limited to that of wife and
mother. The master often cited the three great women of the Chou Dynasty to show that women could achieve great things without being in any official positions:

Take the three great women of the Chou Dynasty – Tai-chiang, Tai-ren, and Tai-si – for example. They performed their duties well, quietly assisting their husbands and educating their children even before they were born. And in this way, their husbands and sons became great rulers and their nation prosperous and peaceful.15

It follows from the evidence and the arguments presented above, that we might say that women are powerful because their accomplishments are incomparable: they prepare the best human beings for a nation, laying the kind of groundwork that no other work can juxtapose. It was in this sense that women have “power” or powers, in Master Yinkuang’s perception.

But, if this power is not properly used, women will cease to be powerful. How should women exercise their power? The answer, according to Master Yinkuang, of course, was to “assist their husbands and educate their children” as found in one of the quotes above. As to the first part, he wrote: “To assist means to help, to help the husband to achieve virtue.16 He often used the expression “yin-hsiang,” literally “to assist in the dark” in such contexts. In other words, women should assist quietly and with respect to the cultivation of virtues, not clamorously and in terms of “official business.”

Based on the notion that women’s powers are most evident in educating their children, Master Yinkuang had a great deal to say on the issue of childrearing. First, he advised women to take several precautions even before a baby is conceived and born: (1) to abstain from sex so that both parents have healthy bodies for the conception; (2) to accumulate virtue by performing good deeds, so that blessings and welfare can be passed down to the child; (3) to cultivate good qualities in the baby (in the womb) by keeping a good temperament, using proper speech, and performing proper behaviors.17

Second, he advised that mothers should teach their children when they are small to: (1) be sagacious and virtuous; (2) believe in the principle of causality; (3) be temperate and mild in character; (4) live a simple life; (5) learn to read in early childhood; and (6) follow the Buddhist teachings. Let us look at each of these more closely.

**To be sagacious and virtuous.** This should be the most important part of the teaching. In order to be sagacious and virtuous, one has to acquire the four ethical principles (propriety, righteousness, uprightness, a sense of shame, and the eight cardinal virtues: loyalty, filial piety, kindness, love, trust, justice, harmony, and equality. Master Yinkuang wrote:

> Children must be taught in early stages to strictly observe filial piety, compassion for people, tolerance, and honesty in behaviors.18

> When children are small, they must be taught to be filial to their parents, loving to their brothers and sisters, loyal to their masters, trustful to their friends, diligent in their work, thrifty in their expenses, mild in character, and respectful to elders. This being done, they will not be misguided after they enter public schools.19

In regard to the teaching of girls, the master emphasized the four virtues of “fidelity, proper manners, proper speech, and good needlework”20 in addition to the other good qualities.

**To believe in the principle of causality and retribution.** Master Yinkuang pointed out that Confucianism can inspire only the intelligent, but the principle of causality and retribution can teach both the intelligent and
the ordinary. In other words, an understanding of this principle can keep ordinary people from committing crimes and help the intelligent to achieve enlightenment.\textsuperscript{21} The importance of teaching this to the young was expressed as follows:

Children should be taught to refrain from killing other lives. They should also be told stories about the three–life causality so that they can become used to it. Thus, they would not kill small insects as kids and commit crimes as adults, not bringing disgrace to their ancestors.\textsuperscript{22}

Children must be taught to understand that their minds are related to the mind of the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and other deities and spirits. If they have done anything evil, it would be known immediately by the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and so on. They must understand that there is no way to hide anything. Thus, they will refrain from evils and be encouraged to perform good deeds.\textsuperscript{23}

\textbf{To be temperate and mild in character.} Master Yinkuang felt that to be temperate and mild was especially relevant to the teaching of girls. Girls must be taught to be temperate and mild when they are young. The advantages of doing so were numerous, in his view. First, a good temperament will help them become healthier and they will have no problems with menstruation and childbirth. Second, with a good temperament, they can make peace with other people in their married families. Third, such a temperament is good for their babies when they are in the wombs. Fourth, while breastfeeding their babies, a temperate state of mind will make the milk good for the babies.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, their babies will be just like them when they grow up. Master Yinkuang wrote: “Women must learn to be mild and humble early in life, so that they can give birth to children easily and their children can be virtuous and enjoy good health and long life.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textbf{To live a simple life.} He also cautioned not to spoil children. Children must be taught to be thrifty and diligent, not to waste anything, and so on. He said:

If your children are old enough to work, you must have them work. You must also tell them not to eat only fine food or dress in only good clothes, nor to throw away any of the five grains or destroy any useful materials whatever their values may be. You must tell them that things are difficult to acquire, and to waste them is to reduce blessings. If they continue to be wasteful, they should be beaten and scolded. And of course, you should tell them why.\textsuperscript{26}

\textbf{To learn to read in early childhood.} The master highly recommended that parents teach children to read when they are little. He provided very specific details about what and how to teach and the rationale behind it. He said:

Children must be taught to recognize words when they begin to speak. First you prepare small pieces of paper and write only one character on each piece. Do not write on both sides for fear of interference. Then, show the paper to your kids and ask them to recognize the character. You can teach them a couple of words every day and review the ones that have been shown before. In less then one year, your children will recognize many words. . . . When they are at school afterwards, they will be able to recognize the words that they have learned.\textsuperscript{27}

He did not approve of sending children to school early. He said:

Do not send them early to present–day schools. It would be better to invite someone who is both virtuous and cultured, and also believes in causality. Ask the teacher to let the kids read the \textit{Four
Books and the Five Classics. Only after they are well-established in such teachings can they have contact with other kinds of reading without being confused and misguided.28

The problem with modern schooling, according to Master Yinkuang, was that the teachers were not good enough. He commented:

Teachers at today's school only know how to write papers and teach pupils; they themselves do not know how to learn from sages and to be like them. They never say anything about how to put ancient teachings into practice. If one learns from this kind of teachers, one will only do harm to society.29

To follow the Buddhist teachings. The Buddhism that the master taught to his followers was, of course, the Pure Land School. He often told them to keep Amitbha and Kuanyin Bodhisattva (Avalokitesvara) in mind, to abstain from killing, to set animals free, to keep a vegetarian diet, and to seek liberation in Amitbha's Pure Land after death. He put special emphasis on the recitation of the names of the Buddha and the bodhisattvas. He wrote:

Small children should be taught to recite the names of the Buddha and Kuanyin Bodhisattva. Since children have no business to take care of, instead of fooling around all day, mothers might as well ask them to repeat the names of the Buddha and Kuanyin Bodhisattva. In so doing, they can decrease their bad karma, and increase their good qualities. This is most advantageous to their body, mind, and life.30

If girls can start early in life to keep Kuanyin Bodhisattva in mind, when they are married and ready to give birth to babies, they will not have too much labor and pain, and their babies will be safely delivered.31 He made the point that if a mother has faith in Buddhism and helps her family to have the same faith, this is the greatest love she can give to them.32

Summary and Conclusion

Master Yinkuang's ideas on women's powers and his suggestions for family education frequently stressed the importance of women's roles in the family, and the consequences of having good women as mothers was repeatedly pronounced. The master's words were almost like the last call for salvation; he pointed out that “Many people do not understand that women's rights are much greater than men's... and that women have not properly used their power. To save our country, we need to urge our women to assume their natural duties and use their power well.”33

Compared to a similar idea in some earlier Buddhist texts, for example, the Sigalovada-suttanta, which states that women have the “freedom” to do housework,34 the master's view appears to be more encouraging. He recognized a more constructive and productive meaning in women's role: to be the guideposts for their husbands and teachers for their children. He also acknowledged significant potential in women's roles as the foundation builders of the nation by acting as such guideposts. He was very adept in using the term “power” rather than “duties” or “obligations.” The positive meanings connected with “powers” must have aroused in many women at that time a sense of importance within themselves – a sense that enables them to value themselves as worthy human beings, not as the ever-submissive and often-oppressed “weaker sex.”

Within the master's theory, it is meaningless to talk about equal “rights” for women and men. As the master said, “Men have men's rights and women have women's,”35 and both play important roles in the
society. In his view, it was not only wrong but also dangerous to encourage women to seek rights or powers other than the “natural ones” at home. Master Yinkuang warned against this equal rights issue: “If women give up their natural duties and wish to hold the same rights and powers as men, this is the beginning of a troublesome world.”

NOTES


2. I use the word “power” for the Chinese “chuan” because it is closer to what the master wished to express. But, of course, in the plural, “powers” is closely related to “rights.”

3. It was after 1920s that he began to take lay people as his disciples, but he never took any monks as his disciples. Master Hung-yi once asked to be his disciple, but he declined the request.


5. The eight steps are: (1) to be earnest, (2) to regulate the mind, (3) to remove desires for external objects, (4) to better learning, (5) to discipline the body, (6) to unify the family, (7) to rule the nation, and (8) to bring peace to the world.


17. “Note to ‘Worshiping Kuanyin Bodhisattva for the purpose of having babies,’” Writings II-2, pp. 525-


24. The master had discovered a theory about breastfeeding. He said, “When a mother gets angry while feeding the baby, her milk will become poisonous. If she is very angry, the baby might die instantly; if she is not very angry, the baby might die after one or two days. This has not been pointed out by any doctors in our country before, but you must trust me so that you could save your children even before they are born.” “Letter to Shia Sho-chi,” *Writings*, III-1, p. 156.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
Gender and Social Reality in Nepal: Implications for Buddhist Nuns and Social Change

Sumon K. Tuladhar

Nepal, with a female population of 9,241,167 as against 9,220,914 males, is predominantly a patriarchal society. A study revealed that 90 percent of parents wanted two sons and a daughter. A study, conducted in Nepal in 1994, showed that 96 percent of parents stated that they would prefer a son in the event they could have only one child. It is obvious that the mind set of parents in Nepal tilts in favor of male children as compared to female children. Gender discrimination exists not only in the preference of a male child, but also in the roles in the society. Roles for females are associated with domestic work and rendering services to the male members of their families, while roles for males are oriented more towards connecting with the outer world in terms of the economy of the family and access to resources. This system is largely responsible for perpetuating violence and injustice against women in the society in the form of child marriage, rape, wife battering, sexual harassment, and girl trafficking.

Gender and Social Reality in Nepal

Nepal is a country where the rate of child marriage is very high. It is a sad statistic that 40 percent of marriages involve children who are under 14 years of age, and 7 percent involve children under 10 years of age. Child marriage occurs in spite of a marriage law that forbids a girl from getting married before the age of 18 and a boy before 20 years of age.

Violence against women is not confined to Nepal; it is a worldwide phenomenon, regardless of the degree of gender equality. Nepal has many forms of violence against women. One study identified 19 different forms of violence against women. Based on this study, the types of violence can be divided into 3 categories: psychological violence, physical violence, and traditional violence. These forms of violence are so prevalent in Nepali society that 95 percent of respondents of the same study admitted witnessing the violence directly or indirectly. The study also showed that 77 percent of the violence is caused by the family members. This has, unfortunately, resulted in an increase in street children and spilled over into many forms of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and trafficking.

Trafficking is one of the forms of violence against girls and women, but it is not a new problem in Nepal, or may not be new even to the world. All over the world, women and girls are trafficked for forced labor, organ transplantation, circus work, domestic labor, adoption, and forced marriage, but the major cause that overshadows all the others is sexual exploitation. However, trafficking is manifesting in many new forms in Nepal. Reports on trafficking estimate that 5,000 to 12,000 girls between the ages of 12-20 years are trafficked from Nepal to other countries for prostitution. An assessment conducted by ILO/IPEC in 2001 reported that among the respondents of the assessment, about one-fourth were under 14 years and more than half were under 16 years when they were trafficked.
Another report estimated that there are 100,000 to 200,000 Nepali girls and women working in the Indian sex industry. However, trafficking is not always a cross-border phenomena; it may also be movement of people from one region to another within a country, which can result in equally serious violations of human rights. Based on various reports on trafficking, a common pattern of girls entering into the sex industry is highlighted in a report by Saathi, an Indian development agency based in Mumbai. Deception and domestic violence are the two major reasons that girls and women enter this profession.

The assessment conducted by ILO/IPEC in Sindhupalchowk and Nuwakot districts reported that a majority of parents of the trafficked girls are illiterate. Among the trafficked girls in these two districts, more than 65 percent of girls were never enrolled in school. In the same line, another study conducted with commercial sex workers found that more than 55 percent of the respondents were totally illiterate. About 15 percent had primary schooling and only 1 percent had completed the tenth grade and above. Thus, among other factors, the level of literacy seems to be one factor in domestic violence, which often ends up in trafficking.

The case of street children is similar. Domestic violence, literacy, and educational status seem to play a negative role in pushing children to the streets. More boys are on the streets than girls, and more illiterate children are on the streets than literate children.

### Economic Activity of Women and Girls

Statistics in Nepal show that girls between 5-9 years of age contribute 3.39 hours of work per day and girls between 10-14 years contribute 7.31 hours, in contrast to boys’ contribution in the same age groups, which were 2.33 hours and 4.93 hours a day, respectively.

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<th>Economic Activity</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
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<td>8.6</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<td>Paid Job</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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The Status of Women Study, completed in the early 1980s, found that women and girls together contribute more than 53 percent of the household income in rural households of Nepal. Recent studies show that there have not been significant changes in this data to date. The Gender Disaggregated Indicator Nepal 2002 provides evidence that women are still contributing more than men and are still confined to few opportunities. Economic deprivation pushes many women to vulnerable positions.

### Gender Discrimination in Education

One study shows that 29 percent of parents still felt that girls were valuable for household work and education for girls was not considered a good investment. In the case of education for boys, 100 percent of parents affirmed that a boy should go to school. Due to the girl child’s inferior status within the family and her obligations to take on more than her share of responsibilities for household work and farming, girls are often deprived of education even when educational opportunities are easily accessible.

The risk factor for girls to drop out of school is 2.6 times higher than for boys. As girls reach secondary education, there is a sharp dropout rate in comparison to boys. The main reason for this high dropout rate is that girls have a heavier load of domestic work by the time they reach the age of secondary education.
Social Realities in the Nepali Buddhist Community

The Buddhist community in Nepal is an integral part of the broader Nepali society. Patriarchal social structures, institutionalized gender bias, and domestic violence in Nepal form the backdrop for an examination of the social realities Buddhist nuns encounter, both in the Nepali Buddhist community and society at large. Early marriage is one of the factors leading to violence against women in terms of women’s health, reproductive rights of women, and decision-making power. Buddhism is one of the more liberal religions.

From time immemorial, the Buddhist community enjoyed somewhat better gender parity in the society as compared to the Hindu community in Nepal. As a result, early marriage is almost nonexistent in the Buddhist community. A Buddhist metaphor for an ideal society is a chariot in which the two front wheels are the monks and nuns and the rear two wheels are the upāsaka and upāsikās (laymen and laywomen). This metaphor is used by Buddhists to highlight the fact that in Buddhism men and women have equal status. However, we can still find some significant differences between the two sexes.

According to Theravāda Buddhism, the Buddha will always be born in male form. The Buddha first ordained monks and when women requested ordination, his assembly refused several times before Gotamī was finally ordained as the first bhikkhunī. The eight garudhammas were instituted and the bhikkhunīs observe 311 rules, while bhikkhus observe 227 rules. According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, there are also female Buddhas, such as the 21 Tārās.

The Buddha honored the bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs with the same title for their achievements: “eda daka.” For example, one who was excellent in meditation was given the title “eda daka in meditation.” The Buddha awarded the distinction of eda daka in each field, such as teaching, studies, knowledge (prajñā), diligence, and so on, to bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs in the same manner. This is the most important indicator of the status of women in Buddhism, because these equal distinctions were awarded by the Buddha himself. Honorific titles were also given to recognize the accomplishments of upāsakas and upāsikās, for example, the person most superior in generosity (dāna), storytelling, nursing patients, and so on.

Nepal is still a country where different religions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism, co-exist peacefully. Historically Buddhists have very carefully blended with Hindu society and adjusted in a process of acculturation. One famous story tells how the Buddhist monks were turned into priests and started to adapt Buddhist practices into the rituals that lay Buddhists still follow today as Vajrayāna Buddhism in Nepal. A good example of this is the Astami Brata ritual that is still practiced in Vajrayāna Buddhism. Analysis of the Astami Brata shows that this ritual was adapted from the astasīla (eight precept) philosophy. Every ritual is full of symbolism and meaning when carefully unpacked. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there have been some distortions of Buddhist philosophy. For example, the use of meat products and alcohol as essential ingredients in some pūjās seems to be out of place in the Buddhist context, where the five precepts (pancha sīla) are central.

However, in reference to gender parity, although Nepali Buddhist society has accommodated to Hinduism to a large extent, women can be seen to have a better status in society. For example, high level Vajrayāna pūjās require that a man and a woman practice together, representing sākty and upāya (power/energy and knowledge). The position of women in Buddhist society is somewhat better than in Hindu society. For example, during menstruation, a Hindu woman falls into the “achhut” category and is excluded from family events. A Buddhist woman enjoys a similar status to her husband in her in-laws’ family. For example, she uses the honorific language only to the family members who are older than her husband, unlike in Hindu society.

The role of daughters in the family after marriage is different in Buddhist Newar society and non-Buddhist society. Daughters are still treated as a part of their natal family even after their marriage. In the mourning period for parents, daughters also mourn for the whole year as sons do, even after their marriage.
Daughters are the key players in preparing ritual foods for parents in their natal home during the mourning period.

Invitation cards are also one of the ways to show hierarchy in the Nepali society, whether Hindu society or Buddhist. In Hindu society, all the invitation cards are sent in the name of the husband. When a man is invited by the wife’s relatives, the invitation is sent to the man, so the real link, the female relative, is placed in a subordinate role. In contrast to this custom, Buddhist Newars always send the invitation to the actual “link relative,” regardless of gender. If the family is invited through the relation of a woman, her name will be written on the card. There is a cultural practice of divorce in Buddhist Newar society. A woman can easily divorce her husband by returning the beetle nuts given to her while proposing.

**Reflections on Theravāda Culture**

Nepal is a patriarchal society and heavily influenced by Hinduism, so there is still a chronic gender bias existing in the socialization process, even in the Buddhist sociocultural context. As monks and nuns are the product of this society, an alarming and rigid attitude of gender bias still exists among the majority of monks and nuns.

Tracing the history of Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal, we can see that the nuns had to struggle with monks in order to get equal rights in teaching Buddhism in Nepal. In Nepal, the history of Theravāda nuns started around 1922, when three women volunteered to be nuns. However, the challenges nuns experienced from monks were documented from the second generation of nuns. For example, when a dynamic nun bought a piece of land to build a vihāra, a group of monks including the head monk, protested and asked them to provide that land as dāna to monks (the Bhikkhu Saṅgha), instead. They even went further and said that teachings by nuns will not be as effective as monks, so nuns should not waste their time competing with monks to teach Buddhism. A booklet documents this incident with a direct quote, which is very degrading to women, especially nuns.

Similarly in the 20th century, history was repeated when another dynamic nun emerged after studying in Myanmar in the 1960s. The revered Bhikkhu Dhammawati was the first nun from Nepal to pass Dhamma examinations in Myanmar. She is a living legend in Theravāda Buddhism in Nepal. Even young monks, who were her contemporary Dhamma colleagues, not only challenged but also threatened her not to teach the Dhamma on a par with monks. One very learned monk even challenged her and said that she could not call her vihāra a vihāra, because it might confuse people who see a vihāra as a residence for monks. Nuns do not have the status to live in a vihāra, he remarked, protesting the signboard at her vihāra. Dhammawati took the challenge from the monks and did not even think twice in her ambition to promote women’s status in Nepali society. She used all her strategic efforts to transform the male bias in society to bring about gender parity through the Dhamma teachings of Lord Buddha. She also ventured to participate in the bhikkhuni ordination ceremony that was organized in Los Angeles, in the United States, in the 1980s. She was ordained as a bhikkhuni and became the first of a group of bhikkhūnīs in Nepal. She was able to mobilize the ānāgārikās and ordained them into the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha for first time in the history of Nepal. This was not acceptable to a large number of bhikkhus.

In 2003, Bhikkhuni Dhammawati tossed another bombshell, by initiating Mahaparitran chanting by bhikkhūnīs. In the past, Mahaparitran chanting in Nepal was a very formal and auspicious ceremony that was carried out only by bhikkhus. Bhikkhuni Dhammawati reasoned that Mahaparitran are verses that are chanted for the benefit of human beings, as well as all beings inside the earth and beyond human reach. These are the words of the Buddha. Women are also the disciples of the Buddha and can also chant paritran for people when they are in need – for good health in times of sickness or in any circumstance. Therefore, bhikkhus should not monopolize this ceremony. So she started to conduct these ceremonies and quite a few have already been successfully conducted. Lay Buddhists were happy and the bhikkhūnīs were satisfied, but
the monks were not. There was a huge protest. One of the nuns wanted to have Mahaparitran performed by bhikkhunīs, so she invited both bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs for the ceremony. There was a huge outrage from the bhikkhus who demanded that the nuns apologize for such misconduct. In order to reduce the commotion from the bhikkhus, which might confuse lay Buddhists and eventually have a negative impact on Buddhism, the nun who was organizing the event went to the monks and formally apologized.

These biased attitudes are still prevalent even now among the monks, who consider the discussion of gender issues a social sickness. This bias is contrary to human rights and is a constraint to building a rights-based society to benefit all human beings. More than 2500 years ago, Lord Buddha clearly showed the value of a gender sensitive society by honoring the outstanding bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, upāsakas, and upāsikās in different fields as “edda daka.” This example shows that Lord Buddha demonstrated what he taught to bring about gender parity in society. Unfortunately, this historical fact is ignored today by leading monks and nuns, who are the nearest disciples of Lord Buddha. This evidence shows how strong the process of gender socialization is in society.

Even in the twenty-first century, monks could not internalize the value of gender parity in the society because they are also products of a society where gender disparity is ingrained. They are reproducing the same “brand” human society. It is widely stated that “rights are not given, but need to be demanded.” Therefore, Sakyadhita can be instrumental in empowering Buddhist women and nuns in the global society.

Opportunities to Bring about Gender Parity in the Buddhist World

Gender parity is the main mantra in development work throughout the world. Even in Nepal, where female literacy is lower than 40 percent, the gender lens has been considered a pre-requisite to human development. This has created a base for mobilizing women on a par with men in social activities outside the periphery of the household. When Ven. Dhammawati established Dharmakirti Vihāra and mobilized lay Buddhists, women came out of their shells to participate actively in social reform activities and gradually became empowered to initiate many new activities, which otherwise would not have been done. For example, they participated in peaceful public rallies mobilized by the vihāras, public activities that are generally supported only by men and women who are extremely progressive. Similarly, Ven Dhammawati has done commendable work to bring opportunities for women and create gender parity in the Buddhist world. Some of her major accomplishments that have resulted in social changes are: a monthly cleaning campaign by middle-class women, creating a learning society, transforming a pūjā-oriented culture to a Dhamma of social service, and temporary ordination as a Buddhist learning experience.

Middle-class people in Nepal are notoriously concerned about the caste system and the division of labor defined by caste. According to this caste system, cleaning public places in Nepal is considered the job of the municipality office and a certain caste group called “sweepers,” who are considered an inferior social class. Referring to the Buddha’s teachings that no human being is high or low by birth or caste, but is judged only by the actions the do, Ven. Dhammawati mobilized her disciples to clean the monastic area at Shree Gha, literally using the brooms and dust bins every month.

Generally, elderly women in Nepal think that they cannot learn to read and write, thus they become dependent on the younger generation. But, Dhammawati Guruma and her colleague nuns started an adult literacy class for learning to read and write the Buddhist sūtras. These days women not only learn to read and write, but also enroll in Baudha Pariyati classes and Abhidhamma classes. More and more women are enrolling in these classes and appearing in the examinations.

In the past, the Dhamma was considered to be only about offering pūjā to various gods and goddesses. Dhammawati Guruma has been able to enlighten the lay Buddhists that there are two types of pūjā: amish pūjā and pratipatti pūjā. She also helped people to practice pratipatti pūjā by engaging them in providing health services, donating booklets, and other activities.
Temporary ordination is another phenomenon that Dhammawati Guruma was able to initiate in Nepal. She advocated that obtaining the Buddhist samskāra by taking ordination is one of the precious acts of a human being. She challenges people to test the renunciant aspect of Buddhism. This has had a positive impact on hundreds of people’s lives every year. This practice is not limited to Dharmakirti Vihāra any more, but is also practiced in many other active vihāras in Nepal.

Another powerful initiative introduced by the Ven. Dhammawati is transforming a cultural initiation called barah tayegu for girls and kayeta puja for boys to mark the adolescent stage of human life. Over the years, this practice lost its meaning as an initiation, but parents and guardians blindly and obediently continued following the rituals until Ven. Dhammawati intervened and introduced the temporary ordination (rishini prabajyā). This has helped young adolescent girls and boys have an opportunity to learn about basic Buddhism. Every year over 500 girls participate in the temporary ordination. Boys who participate in the samānera initiation are still very few in number.

Similarly, death rituals are also blindly followed by the society by the use of a lot of concealed rituals, which do not remind people about any Buddhist philosophy of life. Ven. Dhammawati advised people to print Buddhist scriptures or booklets in the name of the deceased person; this is not only a Dhamma dāna, but also the deceased person will be remembered by the society forever. Consequently hundreds of booklets on Buddhism have been published by Dharmakirti Vihāra.

Following in the footsteps of Ven. Dhammawati, there has been an increase in the number of educated and active young nuns, although the number is still very small. The ground work for social mobilization has been established and women are participating more actively in work outside the home. More and more nuns are educated and trained in Buddhism both inside and outside the country, thanks to global efforts to improve the status of bhikkhunīs.

Because of the improved capacity of nuns in Nepal and their active involvement in social reforms, lay Buddhists are more inclined to the nuns, appreciating their simplicity, approachability, and sincere Buddhist conduct. They even request bhikkhunīs to recite the Mahaparitran. As a result, several of these have been performed by bhikkhunīs. Nevertheless, the faith of the laity is not limited to active and educated nuns only; it has started to spill over to all nuns as well as to monks. Some monks acknowledge this fact. A genuine example can be cited from my conversation with the Mahasthavira elder Ven. Kumar Kashyapa. Since he was getting old and was also sick at that time, I asked him what kind of support he needed. He said, “Thanks to Dhammawati, now lay Buddhists are very generous and are very sensitive to the monks’ needs. There is no scarcity of food and basic needs these days. In the past, sometimes, we even have to go out in search of food.” This illustrates more and more monks are appreciating the nuns’ work and also supporting it in many ways, although strategies to bring about gender parity between monks and nuns are still seriously needed.

Considering how influential nuns have grown within three decades and how monks are also influential for lay Buddhist society, nuns and monks have become the main vehicles for intervening in the socialization process within the family. Until now, they have been preaching Buddhism and gender issues have only been raised by accident – mostly by nuns. Monks are still very gender blind, as revealed in their daily behavior. Even some nuns hold strong bias with regard to areas of work that women can do or cannot do. They are very much guided by the monks. Therefore, some nuns do not feel comfortable about becoming ordained as bhikkhunīs and prefer to remain as ānāgārikā. If these Buddhist “leaders” are gender biased, their bias will be conveyed to the lay Buddhists and the same cultural values and norms will continue.

Buddhist education must also be more and more gender sensitive. Buddhist philosophy needs to be more highlighted to show that there is no difference between male and female, except biological differences. Gender is a social construct that can be changed to achieve equality in the human world. Unless our teachers and leaders change their views and opinions, it will be difficult to intervene in the socialization cycle. Unless there is some strong intervention in the socialization cycle, families will continue to bring up their children in gender biased environments. Consequently violence against women and girl children will increase day by
Therefore, we need to advocate and promote more Buddhist education in this world and our Buddhist leaders need to be more gender sensitive.

NOTES


3. Ibid.


Buddhist Women in World History
Reconstructing Yaśodhara’s Life Narrative: From Siddhārtha’s Wife to Daughter of the Buddha

Shu-Hui Tsai

The Sūtra of Inconceivable Cause and Effect (Fo shuo wei ceng you yin yuan jing) tells the story that the Buddha related to Yaśodhara about his life.¹ The sūtra also offers a Buddhist perspective on love and passion. This article was inspired by that story. I connect Yaśodhara’s various roles in her life history as a young woman, as a wife, and her decision to become a bhikṣunī. The article is divided into four parts: (1) the love relationship between Siddhārtha and Yaśodhara; (2) reconstructing Yaśodhara’s narrative; (3) reinterpreting Yaśodhara’s choices and changes from a modern perspective; and (4) assessing what inspiration Buddhists in modern times may draw from a woman’s narrative in the Buddhist canon.

The Love Relationship between Siddhārtha and Yaśodhara

The Sūtra of Inconceivable Cause and Effect is a canonical text in which the Buddha appears as a magical emanation (nirmitaka)² and relates the story of his relationship with Yaśodhara. The text is very unusual, in that the story is told from the perspective of a monk talking to his former wife. We cannot be sure about the karmic connection between the Buddha and Yaśodhara, but traces of information are recorded in other texts in the Chinese canon, such as the Āgamas, the Jataka tales, and other sūtras. According to these texts, the two parties were involved in various relationships, including love, deception, jealousy, and even hatred. In these stories of previous lifetimes, Siddhārtha usually had the advantage, whereas Yaśodhara appears more passive. She was loved, deserted, and convinced. It seems as though she was never independent.

The Sūtra of Inconceivable Cause and Effect tells the story of the first meeting of Siddhārtha and Yaśodhara in a previous life. At that time, Siddhārtha was a handsome novice monk and Yaśodhara was a beautiful young woman holding five lotuses that she intended to offer to the Buddha of that time. The novice asked her for the lotuses and she said she would give the lotuses to him if he married her. He replied that he could not do so in that lifetime, but made a vow that he would marry her in a future lifetime, if she promised him that she would agree to any act of devotion to the Buddha.

We now fast forward to the future lifetime when the Buddha was born as Siddhārtha and married the young woman, now born as Yaśodhara. When the young prince decided to leave the palace and his young wife to go seek the truth, Yaśodhara felt very sad and mourned for years. After nine years, having achieved awakening, the Buddha returned home and wanted his son to become a monk. Yaśodhara responded, “First you abandon me and now you want my son. How can you be so cruel?” The Buddha then appeared as a magical emanation and reminded Yaśodhara of her vow in the previous life when he was still a bodhisattva and she had begged him to marry her. At that time, he had replied that he was on the bodhisattva path and was not willing to marry her then, but would do so in a future life if she promised to give up everything out of devotion to the Buddha. Now he was asking her to keep her promise. Yaśodhara then understood that all her sufferings in this life were the result of her own passion for the Buddha in that previous lifetime.
Reconstructing Yaśodhara’s Narrative

From the perspective of “three-life karma” (past, present, and future), Yaśodhara started as a young woman, full of illusions about love and passion, and went through different periods in her marriage, from being loved by her husband, to being deserted. The story begins in her past life as a beautiful young woman who falls for a charming young novice; continues to the next life, where she becomes the wife of Siddhārtha; and culminates in her choice to become ordained as a nun intent on following in the footsteps of the Buddha. After Mahāprajāpati, the Buddha’s aunt and foster mother, becomes a nun, Yaśodhara makes the same choice. In the Dharma Flower Sūtra (Fa hua jing), Yaśodhara appears as a bhikṣuṇī, receives the blessings of the Buddha, and makes a vow that one day she will become a Buddha, too. Even when she becomes a nun, she chooses to follow the Buddha, because she loves and admires him. She chooses to become a “Dharma relative” (fa qin), a relationship that is less selfish, possessive, or risky than ordinary human relationships.

Reinterpreting Yaśodhara’s Choices and Changes from a Modern Perspective

We can distinguish between male and female in terms of physical form, but in terms of inner qualities, it may be useful to use the traditional Chinese system that distinguishes between yin qualities (associated with the feminine) and yang qualities (associated with the masculine). These gendered associations are not absolute, of course. That is to say, a man may have more yin qualities and appear more feminine, and a woman may possess more yang qualities and appear more masculine.

During the Buddha’s time, women faced many limitations. It was much more difficult for women to take an independent role in that social context. In that context, Yaśodhara followed the teachings of the Buddha, made a new choice, learned to know herself, and transformed herself through Dharma practice. In modern times, Yaśodhara’s experience could be a useful mirror for reflection.

Love and affection are important for all living beings. From a Buddhist point of view, however, greed for love and affection is also a cause for suffering. To get rid of conflicts and anxieties, one must learn to love unconditionally. Love and affection must be transformed into pure, stainless compassion. As a person becomes less attached and selfish, love and affection grow proportionately. To practice love perfectly, we need to be fully awake. There are four dimensions of true love, which are called the four immeasurable attitudes (brahmavihaāras): (1) compassion (karuṇā), the wish to transform the sufferings of sentient beings, (2) loving kindness (maitrī), the wish to bring happiness to others, (3) joy (muditā), feelings of peace, cheerfulness, and rejoicing with all beings, and (4) equanimity (upekṣā), feelings of equality toward all beings.

Inspiration for Buddhist Women in Modern Times

In the long stream of time, sentient beings, according to their karma, sometimes appear as male, sometimes as female, and sometimes as both or neither. In terms of human integrity, it does not matter whether one is male or female. What matters most is whether one can balance the yin and yang qualities within oneself, whether one has developed inner qualities, and whether one is practicing non-attachment. When we are honest with ourselves, focus on the practice of patience, and are able to balance our yin and yang qualities authentically, we can play all the roles that Yaśodhara did with greater awareness, whether it be the role of wife, love, or daughter of the Buddha.

In modern times, bhikṣuṇīs in Taiwan have been able to break through biological and cultural limitations and actively demonstrate their abilities. The bhikṣuṇīs in Taiwan have two choices: they can either choose to follow the tradition and practice the Dharma without taking an active role in society, or they can choose...
to be actively involved in social welfare, cultural activities, education, and charity. Physically, they appear to have relinquished their female identity and refuse to be assigned a specific gender. They thereby refuse to be sexualized and materialized. Instead, they appear as androgynous.

So far, the bhikṣuṇīs in Taiwan have been able to overcome many of the difficulties experienced by female practitioners in the Buddha’s times. They have more power and resources, and they have been making tremendous contributions. In the field of education, Bhikṣuṇī Shig Hiu Wan established Huafan University. In the field of charitable work, Bhikṣuṇī Venerable Cheng-Yen founded Tzu Chi (Ciji) Foundation. Academically, Bhikṣuṇī Heng-ching taught in the Department of Philosophy at National Taiwan University. In the field of monastic education, Bhikṣuṇī Wu-yin established Xiangguang Temple. In the field of social activism, Bhikṣuṇī Zhaohui from Hongshi Buddhist College is an active spokesperson for a wide variety of social issues. Many great bhikṣuṇīs are devoted to the benefit of all sentient beings. To promote cultural exchange among Buddhist women internationally, bhikṣuṇīs are forming a Taiwan branch of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women.

Yaśodhara followed in the Buddha’s footsteps in practicing non-attachment and achieving direct insight into emptiness. In subsequent centuries, thousands of bhikṣuṇīs and Buddhist laywomen have done likewise. Buddhist women today are still learning, practicing, and attempting to follow in the Buddha’s footsteps by developing compassion and wisdom.

NOTES

1.  T. 14, no. 754, pp. 575b-588c. *Fo shuo wei ceng you yin yuan jing*, trans. Shi Tan-Jing (479-502) is a Buddhist text in which the Buddha speaks specifically to Yaśodhara, Mahāprajāpatī, and other family members. The Buddha talks about ten methods for developing goodness, and uses analogies and narratives to explain karmic affinities. Narrators of canonical texts include the Buddha, the disciples, the gods (*xian ren shuo*), the heavens (*zhu tian shuo*), and magical emanations (*nirmitaka, hua ren shuo*). In this classic text, the Buddha is the narrator. Its alternative title, *Fo shuo wei ceng you*, refers to the various teaching methods he used.

2. The Sanskrit word *nirmitaka* refers to beings transformed through magical power (*shen tong*).
Women Regaining a Lost Legacy: 
The Restoration of the Bhikkhunī Order in Sri Lanka

Hema Goonatilake

This article traces the process of protests and struggles through which full ordination was finally restored in Sri Lanka in 1998 after nearly one thousand years. The article also describes the dynamics through which the new order is increasingly being accepted in Sri Lanka to the extent that, in some rural areas, bhikkunis are preferred to monks. It also describes the first steps of introducing Theravāda higher ordination to other countries.

The Introduction and Restoration of the Bhikkunī Order in Sri Lanka

Just six months after the introduction of bhikkhu order to Sri Lanka by Asoka's son Mahendra in 250 BCE, Mahendra's sister Saṅghamitta arrived with a branch of the bodhi tree and introduced the bhikkunī order. The order of nuns flourished until 1017 CE, when it became defunct after the Chola invasion. The bhikkhu order was restored on two occasions, but the bhikkunī order was not.

In the absence of the bhikkunī order, a movement of ten-precept nuns (dasasili'matas) began. An affluent young Christian-born Sri Lankan woman named Catherine de Alwis embraced Buddhism, and because she was not given ordination as a nun, left for Burma in 1894. After a training period of three years, she became a nun with ten precepts, as distinct from the 311 precepts of a bhikkhuni. She returned to Sri Lanka in 1905 and formed the Sudharmadhara Samiti in Kandy to promote the movement of ten-precept nuns. An ārama (monastery) for nuns was established in 1907. This marks the beginning of the nuns' movement in Sri Lanka.

The restoration of the bhikkunī order in Sri Lanka has been a subject of debate for over a hundred years. Anagarika Dharmapala, an influential Sri Lankan Buddhist leader, advocated restoration of the order in 1891. From the 1930s on, the topic was debated in the newspapers and among monks and scholars. Several nuns joined in the debate. More recently, in 1980, three Members of Parliament (all male) proposed the restoration of the bhikkunī order as one of the proposals to be presented to the Parliament to promote Buddhism. This created an uproar among the monks and the laity and the proposal was abandoned.¹

Even so, the government has responded to the needs of the nuns in several ways. In 1983, the Department of Buddhist Affairs of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs initiated a program at district level monks’ institutions to provide educational facilities to ten-precept nuns to prepare them for the Buddhist studies examinations, a provision that was previously available only to monks. By 1995, 15 institutions were running classes for nuns. Identity cards were issued to nuns as a first step toward recognition. Nuns’ organizations were formed at the district level and a federation was created to link them together. The executive committee of this federation began meeting monthly in Colombo to discuss and make decisions about activities at the district level.²
The nuns have been making slow but steady progress to improve conditions. Many nuns have seized the opportunity to network and organized themselves. They have been gaining self-confidence and self-esteem due to the State patronage they have received. Strong resentment toward the monks’ dominance has encouraged the younger nuns to better equip themselves with more education and greater discipline and strength. The marginalization of nuns in relation to the monastic hierarchy has made these nuns bolder and given them a spirit of courage to challenge the monks.⁢

Arguments For and Against the Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order

In Sri Lanka today there are both opponents and advocates of the restoration of the bhikkhuni order. Opponents argue that the Theravāda bhikkhuni lineage has been broken and the bhikkhuni order does not exist in any Theravāda country. Sri Lanka is the only Theravāda country where the bhikkhuni order has ever existed; the order was never established in Thailand, Burma,⁴ Cambodia or Laos. The Theravāda tradition maintains that women should first be ordained by nuns and that their ordination should then be confirmed by the monks. Today the bhikkhuni order exists only in Mahāyāna countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam. If the bhikkhuni order is introduced from a Mahāyāna country, opponents argue, this will be a Mahāyāna tradition, not Theravāda. They further argue that one can attain nibbāna (Sanskrit: nirvāna) even without becoming a bhikkhuni.

Those who argue in favor of restoring the bhikkhuni order maintain that without bhikkunis, an important component of the fourfold Saṅgha of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen is missing. To reestablish the order would be in accordance with the principle of equality which the Buddha gave to women. If the bhikkhuni order is reestablished, the Buddha's special injunction for monks to confer higher ordination to nuns could be followed. Proponents argue that Chinese nuns received higher ordination from Sri Lankan nuns in 433 CE in Nanjing and therefore, can now confer higher ordination upon Sri Lankan nuns today.

Advocates in favor of restoring the bhikkhuni order draw attention to the restoration of the monks’ order in earlier centuries. Earlier, when the monks’ order became extinct in Sri Lanka, it was brought back from Burma in the eleventh century and from Thailand in the eighteenth century. Based on this example, if the same rule applies, the bhikkhuni order that exists in China can be used to restore the bhikkhuni lineage in Sri Lanka.⁵ The same bhikkhuni ordination that was introduced to China by Sri Lankan bhikkunis later spread to Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

Opponents who opposed restoring the bhikkhuni order are said to include the supreme patriarchs of the three chapters of the bhikkhu order and many senior monks in Sri Lanka. Only a few monks have made periodic public announcements, however, stating that a request to restore the bhikkhuni order cannot be granted within the Theravāda Vinaya tradition. They base their argument on the claim that the Chinese bhikkunis practice the Mahāyāna Vinaya (monastic code) and therefore can only confer a Mahāyāna higher ordination.

Overcoming the Fear of Mahāyāna

One way to help overcome the anxieties these monks feel about the Mahāyāna tradition is to demonstrate the similarities between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna Vinaya traditions. A comparative study of the Theravāda Bhikkhuni Vinaya and the Dharmagupta Bhikkhuni Vinaya tradition that is presently observed by Chinese bhikkunis reveals that the rules are essentially the same and that the Dharmagupta is, in fact, a subsect of the Theravāda tradition. The only difference is that the Dharmagupta Bhikkhuni Vinaya has 25 additional rules.
The anxieties that Sri Lankan monks express in relation to the Mahāyāna tradition show that there is a need for further study of contemporary Mahāyāna nuns. In September 1984, I made a tour in China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong to get a firsthand experience of the contemporary bhikkhuni movement. During this tour, I combined lectures with participant observation as a temporary nun in nunneries in mainland China, Taiwan, and Korea. In Taiwan, I found that the bhikkunis are highly organized and well supported. At the Fo Guang Shan monastery where I stayed in Taipei, I made a written appeal to Fo Guang Shan headquarters to organize a ceremony to restore the higher ordination to Sri Lankan nuns. The only snag was that the Sri Lankan government had no diplomatic ties with Taiwan. For this reason, Sri Lankan government sponsorship was unlikely.

The situation in mainland China in 1984 was quite different. In mainland China, the Buddhist temples and nunneries were being restored with government grants after the disruption of earlier years. The publication of Buddhist books was being resumed and schools for training nuns and monks were being reestablished. I was the first foreign guest to reside in the nunneries in Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai that had been opened after the Cultural Revolution. I met a few older bhikkunis who had continued to practice the precepts even after they were expelled to the countryside. In discussions with the Buddhist Association of China, I raised the possibility of mainland Chinese nuns conferring higher ordination on Sri Lankan nuns. Although government sponsorship was likely, the Chinese were not sufficiently organized to stage such an event.

At the conclusion of my tour, I submitted a proposal to the Department of Buddhist Affairs in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Sri Lanka describing the unbroken lineage of the Chinese bhikkunis and their strict observance of bhikkhuni precepts, both in China and Taiwan, and advocated the reestablishment of higher ordination in Sri Lanka with assistance from the Chinese tradition. I translated into Sinhala language the Biographies of Buddhist Nuns that was written in China in the sixth century CE. This book includes a description of the establishment of the higher ordination in China by the Sinhala bhikkunis who made two journeys to present-day Nanjing in 428 and 433 CE. The translation of this book, which describes the strict discipline observed by the ancient Chinese nuns, dispelled the misconceptions about the discipline of the Chinese Bhikkunis previously held in Sri Lanka by the ten-precept nuns, their devotees, and the monks. Subsequently, in 1985, the Minister of Religious and Cultural Affairs of Sri Lanka led a delegation to mainland China in 1985 to explore the possibility of restoring the bhikkhuni order in Sri Lanka. After his return, I was requested to draft a memorandum stating all the arguments in support of restoring the bhikkhuni order with the assistance from China. Unfortunately, a number of Buddhist organizations passed resolutions against the moves for restoration and the Minister’s move was shelved.

The Bhikkhuni Movement Gathers Momentum

Despite opposition from various quarters, many more young nuns began voicing strong sentiments in the mass media in support of restoring the bhikkhuni order. Monthly magazines and booklets advocating restoration appeared. Mainstream newspapers in both Sinhala and English gave increasing coverage to the debate between monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen on the bhikkhuni issue. The issue has now become a continuing topic of public discourse. In 1986 a documentary film on the nuns’ movement was made by the State Television Corporation. This film, which covered the views of both the advocates of restoration and the opponents, won an award as the best documentary of the year.

There were other signs of hope as well. Local women’s organizations for the first time began to view the issue of bhikkhuni ordination as a women’s rights issue and organized seminars at the national and district level in which nuns participated. A critical mass of scholars, both lay and bhikkhus from universities and monastic institutions, began to advocate restoration and build alliances with the nuns.

The bhikkhuni issue also entered the international arena. By the mid-80s, several European and American women who were ordained in the Theravāda tradition also became active in the campaign. One was the
German-born Ayya Khema who frequently visited and stayed in Sri Lanka and provided considerable support and strength to the Sri Lankan nuns. Many Sri Lankan monks running Buddhist temples in the West became increasingly open-minded about the issue. Some of these monks conducted samānerī ordinations in the United States. Sri Lankan monks who traveled outside the country were exposed to questions about their rationale for excluding women from the Buddha’s order.

**Sakyadhita: The International Buddhist Women’s Network**

The Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Nuns, organized in 1987 in Bodhgaya by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo with the help of Ayya Khema and Professor Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (now Bhikkhunī Dhammananda) made the restoration of the bhikkhunī order into a global issue. One of the stated objectives of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women was “to assist women who wish to obtain ordination and work toward establishing full ordination for Buddhist women in countries where it is not currently available.” His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who was the keynote speaker at this first Sakyadhita conference, fully endorsed the idea. The Third Sakyadhita International Conference, held in Colombo in 1993, provided an opportunity for Sri Lankan nuns to meet for the first time and to encounter bhikkhunīs from many parts of the world who enjoyed equal status with the monks. They saw these nuns as role models to be followed.

A number of initiatives for the restoration of the bhikkhunī order occurred following this conference. A team of Sri Lanka monks headed by Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasara trained ten selected Sri Lankan nuns for missionary activities in India. After three months of training, a team of Korean nuns gave higher ordination to these Sri Lankan nuns in December 1996 at Sarnath, India. The leader of this pioneering group of nuns was Bhikkhunī Kusuma (formerly Kusuma Devendra).

An influential Sri Lankan monk named Ven. Inamaluwe Sumangala, the chief monk of a 2,200-year old monastery in the central province of Sri Lanka, established the Bhikkhunī Educational Academy to provide training to nuns to prepare them for higher ordination. By 1996, he had completed three such training programs. By that time, an international higher ordination ceremony was organized by the Fo Guang Shan Monastery of Taiwan in February 1998 at Bodhgaya. Twenty of those trained at the Bhikkhunī Educational Academy were selected to participate in the higher ordination ceremony at Bodhgaya. After a one-week training, a total of 149 monks and nuns (14 monks and 135 nuns) received ordination. They came from Asian countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Vietnam and from Western countries such as England, Germany, Italy, Spain, Belgium, the United States, Canada, and Australia. They received higher ordination in the Dharmagupta tradition, an early branch of the Theravāda that has continued in an unbroken lineage in China and Taiwan. The 24 monk preceptors and witnesses included monks of the Theravāda tradition from India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Nepal, and monks of Mahāyāna tradition from Taiwan, Hong Kong and Malaysia. The 12 bhikkhunī preceptors and witnesses came from Taiwan, Korea, and the United States (two ordained in the Tibetan tradition). Sri Lankan monks served as the preceptors of the Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs.

**Bhikkhunī Order Reestablished on Sri Lankan Soil**

After an intensive three months of training, Ven. Sumangala organized a higher ordination ceremony for the first time on Sri Lankan soil in the presence of a large array of recognized Sri Lankan monks. Here the twenty bhikkhunīs who had received higher ordination in Bodhgaya gave higher ordination to another 22 nuns who had completed training at the Bhikkhunī Educational Academy. The ceremony was conducted at the ordination hall (sima-malaka) of the 2,200-year-old temple, which until then was used exclusively for monks’ ecclesiastical activities. The ordination was history unfolding.
The event was highly publicized with news carried in banner headlines in all national newspapers including the state owned ones. Impressive pictures of bhikkhunis walking in single file with their bows and robes adorned several newspapers. In an interview for television channels that evening, Ven. Sumangala emphasized the fact that, in restoring the bhikkhuni order after more than 900 years, he merely followed the injunctions laid down by the Buddha. There were no negative reactions in the media; on the contrary, the media reports were all positive. Not a single monk made any negative comment, perhaps out of fear of losing middle-class female devotees.

The strategies adopted by Ven. Sumangala seems to have assured the acceptability of the ordination. First, support for the idea of restoring the bhikkhuni order from a wide variety of nuns’ communities during the training for higher ordination was obtained. Second, highly publicized receptions were organized for the nuns upon their return to their Sri Lankan communities after ordination. These receptions included chief monks, Members of Parliament, and district chiefs to help gain wide acceptance.

Thorough training for the newly ordained bhikkhunis also helped to ensure acceptance. The new bhikkhunis were required to assemble once a month at the Training Academy to get guidance on ecclesiastical practices and to maintain a collective spirit for the stability of the lineage. A code of ethics for bhikkhunis, with detailed instructions on the observance of monastic practices, was instituted. Bhikkhunis were advised to pay due respect to monks in their areas and work closely in cooperation with them. Training programs for bhikkhunis and higher ordination ceremonies continue to be held at the Academy. The tenth ceremony was held in July 2004.

Another triumph was that at the opening ceremony of a new monastery building, Ven. Sumangala addressed the gathering, “Bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, upāsaka, upāsikās,” referring to the fourfold disciples of the Buddha. It was historical to hear the fourfold assembly addressed in this way after a gap of one thousand years. It was also significant that this mode of address was used in the presence of one of the supreme patriarchs. Equally significant was the sanghika dāna that was offered to 500 bhikkhus and 50 bhikkhunis who walked in procession to take their seats in the new building – a scene from the Buddha’s time being reenacted.

Ecclesiastical acts for the newly ordained bhikkhunis have been re-established and already nine programs have been held to help train them in these Vinaya procedures. Like the bhikkhus, bhikkhunis are required to perform certain ecclesiastical acts, such as fortnightly Patimokkha recitation and a discussion on any violation of these rules among the bhikkhunis. An annual vassa (rainy season retreat) is to be conducted and a kathina (robes) ceremony held to mark the conclusion of the vassa. These procedures (vinaya kamma) should be conducted in a sima malaka, a hall with a demarcated boundary, especially constructed for performing ecclesiastical acts. Already eight sima malakas have been constructed attached to bhikkhunī āramas in different parts of the country. The sima malakas are being constructed so that the bhikkhunis who live in the vicinity can get together to perform biweekly recitations of the Patimokkha rules. Those bhikkhunis who do not yet have a sima malaka use the one available in the nearby bhikkhus’ monasteries, with the bhikkhus’ permission.

Another Bhikkhunī Training Center has been established in a hermitage in Newgala, Galigamuwa in Kegalla District by the senior bhikkhu who established the first dasasilmātā ārama 41 years ago in memory of his mother. Teams of nuns in 18 āramas operating under his guidance were given bhikkhuni training. The first team of 15 nuns received higher ordination at a ceremony organized by Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Taiwan in April 2000. Two years later, a second team of 15 nuns received higher ordination from those bhikkhunis who were ordained at Fo Guang Shan. Today there is a total of over 400 fully-ordained bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka. Several nuns from India, Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, the United States, and the Czech Republic have received higher ordination in Sri Lanka during the last five years. The ordination of the only bhikkhuni from Thailand, Ven. Dhammananda (former Prof. Chatusumarn Kabilsingh of Thammasat University), was highly publicized and is still widely criticized.
The New Tasks Performed by Bhikkunis

There were a few tasks that the nuns were not qualified to perform before receiving higher ordination. They included: (1) receiving saṅghika dāna, alms given to a group of five or more members of the Saṅgha (bhikkhus or bhikkunis), which is believed to grant great merit to the donor; and (2) the performance of funeral ceremonies. These new tasks were undertaken by the bhikkunis.

Officiating at funeral ceremonies is perhaps the most respected of the religious functions of the Saṅgha. In villages where there are no monks or where bhikkunis are preferred to monks because of the services they have rendered to the community, bhikkunis are invited to officiate at funeral ceremonies. There have also been rare instances when both bhikkhus and bhikkunis are invited to participate together at funeral ceremonies. They are offered seats of the same height on either side of the dead body, and they chant together. The customary speech made by a member of the village Saṅgha is made by a monk. At the end of the ceremony, monks and nuns are offered similar gifts. Monks who participate in funeral ceremonies together with nuns are certainly more liberal ones who do not feel that their status in society is threatened. These instances indicate a beginning acceptance of bhikkunis by village monks.

Paritta ceremonies for blessing and protection that last all night are generally conducted by monks in a specially constructed pavilion. In recent years, dasasilmts have also been invited by village communities to conduct this ceremony. The bhikkunis now perform this ceremony with more confidence, due to their enhanced spiritual status.

There have been also occasions in certain villages when the monks have tried to dissuade villagers from attending the full-moon-day religious ceremonies conducted in temples by bhikkunis, possibly due to fear that bhikkunis would become more popular among the villagers, and that monks would lose their patronage.

Conclusions

The newly established order of bhikkhuni in Sri Lannka is gaining social recognition and the bhikkunis’ self-esteem has enhanced. The recognition of the bhikkunis by monks is increasing mainly because the bhikkunis are respectful to the monks and do not do any thing to offend them. The respect commanded by the bhikkunis and the recognition given to them by their respective communities have dramatically increased. Hardly any criticism of the restoration of the bhikkhu ordination has appeared in the newspapers and none of the earlier vocal opponents of the ordination have reappeared. The bhikkunis have not been formally recognized by the monks’ hierarchy or the government, yet many leading monks have individually given the bhikkunis their blessing. This situation will undoubtedly change slowly but steadily.

NOTES


Nuns And Laywoman of the Chinese Teaching of the Three Levels: An Historical Perspective on Lay Status

Claudia Wenzel

In Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism, one almost forgotten movement ascribed a special status to laywomen: the Teaching of the Three Levels (sanjiejiāo). This movement, founded by the monk Xinxing (540-594 CE), flourished for some time during Sui- and Tang-Dynasties (581-904), but finally vanished after having been attacked several times by the imperial court. The followers of this teaching are most remembered for their practice of Universal Respect. According to the doctrine that each person possesses an inherent Buddha nature (tathgata-garbha), adherents followed a practice described in the Lidai sanbao ji [Records of the Three Jewels in historical dynasties]: “Wishing to emulate the bodhisattva Never Despise in the Lotus Sūtra, they revered everybody they met on the road, regardless of whether that person was a man or woman.”

Furthermore, we know from his biography in the Xu gaoseng chuan [Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks] that at one point of his life Xinxing himself abandoned the full monastic precepts, but nevertheless “made offerings to the various [Fields of] Respect and Compassion, venerating renunciants and laity alike.” The Field of Respect (jingtian) relates to the Three Jewels, while the Field of Compassion (beitian) means sowing seeds for the benefit of all sentient beings. Why Xinxing relinquished the full set of precepts is nowhere clearly stated. He might have been forced to do so because of the Buddhist persecution in the years from 574-577, or he might have chosen to do so because he wanted to engage in physical labor to better serve the Field of Compassion. In any case, his relinquishing of a section of the monastic precepts was accompanied by his high respect for lay status.

Xinxing’s high esteem for the laity must be understood against the background of a belief in the end of the Dharma (mōfà). Like many of his contemporaries, Xinxing was convinced that the decline of Dharma had already set in. He understood decline particularly in terms of human capacity and appropriate teaching. In this way, he discerned a distinction between three types of beings: (1) beings of the first level, who could be taught the one vehicle (ekayāna); (2) beings of the second level, who still could profit from the teachings of the Three Vehicles (triyāna), and (3) beings of the third level, who were “born blind“ and had no more capacity to discern the true Dharma from the false. Each level of human capacity corresponded to a certain place of practice: beings of the first level could practice in quiet retreats in mountains and forests as well as in the crowded cities; beings of the second level could practice the way only in secluded mountains and forests; and beings of the third level had no choice but to practice within cities and towns, for their salvation depended upon compassion and universal respect. Since almost everybody belonged to the third level in times of the Decline of Dharma, Xinxing urged his followers to leave the mountains and practice unlimited giving (dāna) in the bustling cities, to revere the “Field of Compassion.”
This teaching of lost human capacity for understanding in the third level had some consequences for doctrines and practices among Xinxing’s followers. First, it was most important to avoid slandering the Dharma. Since it was believed that people no longer knew what the right teaching was, all teachings, including false teachings and even non-Buddhist teachings, had to be venerated. The Buddhist Saṅgha was also regarded as incapable of preserving the True Dharma, and had furthermore been criticized in these days for ongoing corruption and decay. Still, all members of the Saṅgha, no matter whether they kept or broke the precepts, had to be revered. Second, since giving was upgraded to the highest practice, it was considered the duty not only of laypeople, but of monks and nuns as well. Along these lines, Xinxing established communities of Three Levels followers, with rather rigid dhūta practices for those who were ordained, in close cooperation with laypeople.

Evidence of Nuns of the Three Levels Teaching

The little we know of women within the Three Levels teaching comes mainly from epigraphs. In today’s Henan province near Anyang, in mountainous Baoshan, a community of nuns of this teaching seems to have been established early on. On Baoshan’s Mt. Lanfeng, reliquaries for nuns and laywomen from local nunneries have been erected. One of the more prominent reliquaries belongs to the meditation master Sengshun, who died in 639:

Meditation master Sengshun was from She county in Hanzhou. Her family name was Zhang. She left home when she was seven years old. Following her teachers, she studied, and for more than forty years she sought teachings everywhere. At age 85, on the 18th day of the second month of the 13th year Zhenguan (639) she died at Guangtian Nunnery... On the 22nd day, her coffin was escorted to the burial place. According to the practice of forest burial (linzang), her disciples collected the relics, and erected a pagoda on [this] famous mountain....

This reliquary inscription mentions a number of terms and practices that are characteristic of followers of the Three Levels teaching: “The Buddha’s teaching in accordance with capacity” is another name for this movement, stressing the necessity for all teachings to be in accordance with the capacity of the beings of the third level. “Recognizing evil” is a term used for repentance rites of this community. The most central practice was probably begging for food, which was uncommon in China, where monasteries cultivated land for this purpose and even collected taxes. Many of the severe dhūta practices also centered around food, such as eating only one meal a day and sharing the little food obtained with the poor or even animals. Finally, the practice of “forest burial,” sometimes referred to as “sky burial,” was common among Three Level followers. In a final act of giving, the body of the deceased person was abandoned in the woods or under the open sky to feed wild animals.

Although Sengshun’s reliquary inscription is the most detailed one, there are other epitaphs on Lanfeng mountain that mention nuns from the same nunnery, Guangtiansi, who explicitly practiced “the numerous begging for food” (qishi zhong) or were given a “forest burial.” Most probably, Sengshun succeeded in establishing a Three Levels community. Noteworthy is the fact that next to the reliquaries of nuns, including Sengshun’s, the reliquaries of laywomen can also be found. In those cases I have been able to examine, these upāsikā were the deceased mothers of women who had become nuns.

The practice of grouping reliquary pagodas of ordained and lay people around a central pagoda of a deceased master can be attested not only for the nuns at Mount Lanfeng, but also for the monks who were buried near Lingquan Monastery. The creation of such a “pagoda forest” seems to have originated in this area and spread to other regions as well, particularly to the Zhongnan mountains near today’s Xi’an in Shaanxi province, where Xinxing was buried. When Xinxing’s main disciple Sengyong died in 631, it was...
his wish to be buried close to his master. Numerous other disciples, ordained and unordained, men and women, followed suit. In 771 the temple nearby was renamed Hundred Pagoda Temple (Baitasi) because of the multitude of reliquary pagodas that competed with each other. In fact, the last Three Levels follower we have literary evidence about is a nun who was buried here. Great Master Hujing (778-831) died at Zhixin Temple near Xi’an and her relics were transferred to Hundred Pagoda Temple. Above her relics, a dhāranī pillar was erected, the inscription of which has been preserved until today.4

Lay Precepts

Since the scriptures of the teaching of the Three Levels never made it into the official Buddhist canon and the movement itself had died out by the end of Tang Dynasty (618-907), modern research about it has had to rely mainly on manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang.5 On handwritten scrolls, we find the doctrinal foundations of the movement, such as taking refuge in the Universal Buddha, Universal Dharma, and Universal Saṅgha, and practicing Universal Respect. We also find manuals listing the regulations of this community. One of the manuscripts discovered latest is P 2849, which has three texts written on its reverse side. These texts include a manual of monastic regulations (zhīfā), rules for begging food (qi shì fā), and a manual for receiving the eight precepts (shòu bājiè fā). The last text, which describes how to bestow the eight precepts to laypeople, gives a very vivid description of the preparations made by men and woman who wished to receive the eight precepts during that time:

When commoners receive the precepts, it is first necessary to teach the people receiving the precepts to take off all headgear, belts, leather boots, and the like; to bare the right arm; and to kneel down with the palms joined and the right knee touching the ground. In the case of women, they need to take off their gold and silver hairpins and bracelets, jewelry and decorations made of the seven precious stones, and the like. In case they wear garments on the upper body, they may take off only one layer of cloth on the right shoulder, but should not completely bare the body. If they have put on rouge and powder and decorated their body before, they need to wash it off completely. Then they should kneel down according to the regulations, repent whole-heartedly, and concentrate upon receiving the precepts.6

This text not only describes how to bestow the usual five precepts on laypeople, but nine precepts altogether, including vows not to wear perfumed clothes, make-up, hair ornaments, and scented oils; not to attend music and dance performances; not to sit or lie on high chairs and beds; and not to eat after noon. It has been proposed that this extension of lay precepts, in additions to the dhūta practices for the ordained, are to be interpreted as an effort to try even harder in the face of the Decline of the Dharma. In this respect, it can be assumed that Xinxing did not merely wish to eliminate the differences between ordained and lay, but deeply respected the precepts.7 After all, Xinxing was working hard at institutionalizing his new teaching in separate temples or sub-temples. When he was summoned to the court by Emperor Sui Wendi in 589, five years before his death, he took up residence in the capital as one of the most eminent monks of his times.

Laywomen in the Period of Decline of the Dharma

Xinxing remained a towering figure in all of the Three Levels Movement. In roughly 250 years following his death, the movement could not produce another figure equaling him in status and importance. Little we know of activities of other Sanjie masters, but around the middle of the 7th century, some figures inside the movement drew new conclusions of the formerly more or less rhetorical notion of “no more capacity to discern the true teaching.”8 Most informative in this respect is a hand-written hagiography of an anonymous Three-Levels master (Dunhuang manuscript P. 2550). This master of meditation neither shaved his head
nor wore the robe, while he was preaching to monks and laymen alike. It is reported that he made the following statement: “I did not say that those who shave their heads and wear the kṣāya are monks. Those who obey my law are monks; they are my disciples, and I am their master. If they do not obey my law, then I am not their master.”

More than once, his instructions made ordained monks return to lay life. On one occasion, he compared the food given to monks by lay patrons to a deadly bait placed in a trap, since men did not know any longer of correctly performing rituals. shocked, more than ten monks abandoned the precepts and returned to lay life. The activities of this meditation master have been interpreted as “…the Three Stages sect celebrat[ing] the reversion of monks to secular life as one expression of proper religiosity.” The anonymous master himself refused to wear the kṣāya because he, as a common man, breaking countless precepts out of knowing no better, should not wear the clothing of a sage.

Furthermore, this master was particularly eager to teach the Dharma to women. When asked, why he does not teach men to practice the Way, but only teaches women, the master answered:

This Dharma should be practiced by [the ordained who have] left home. [The ordained who have] left home do not practice this Dharma any longer, so that it disappears. Men cannot practice it, because they are in the king’s service. Those who have left home cannot practice it, because of [their greed for] wealth. That’s it, all roads are blocked. There is no more place to obtain peace. These women [that I teach], whom should they blame [for all this]? He then proceeds to confirm that these women, who in all stupidity give away their wealth, will be reborn on lotus flowers and therefore obtain the Way:

Activities of masters like the one described in Dunhuang manuscript P 2550 drove the unobtainability of any Buddhist teaching to extremities, and resulted in suppression of all of the movement of the Three Levels. As has been noticed, this kind of teaching was not so much a threat for worldly rulers, but more for the established and institutionalized Buddhist orthodoxy, that was in its own interest striving to create a Buddhist empire under the Tang-Dynasty. Refusal of any kind of monastic institution or fixed set of rules and precepts would certainly not serve this purpose.

Conclusions

It is usually acknowledged that acceptance of the doctrine of Decline of Dharma (mofa) was fundamental for the foundation and development of Pure Land Buddhism, that is praised to this very day for opening an easy path to salvation for all mankind without exception, thus also enhancing the status of lay people. Much less is known that there has been another movement in Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism which deeply respected the efforts of laity: The teaching of the Three Levels drew its own conclusions out of the ongoing decline of Dharma, that eventually led to the school’s suppression and extinction. Since the discovery of the famous manuscripts at Dunhuang in the beginning of the 20th century and more recently, strengthened efforts in deciphering epigraphic materials, we are now in a position to appreciate this teaching’s contribution to the establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China.

Like in most cases, we do not know a lot about nuns and laywomen within the movement of the Three Levels. However scarce evidence is, I feel left with the impression that women played a crucial part in upholding the movement by willingly integrating the new doctrines into their daily practice. And some of the points discussed give at least proof of a new kind of awareness about what woman are able to contribute, and that they are equally able to practice the Way. At least for 7th century China, that must have been quite revolutionary.
NOTES


2. T 2060.50.560a, Ibid., p. 28.


5. See Yabuki Keiki, Sangaikyō no kenkyū (Studies in the Teaching of the Three Levels) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten), 1974 reprint. Yabuki’s ground-breaking work was first published in 1927. He identified Dunhuang manuscripts of this teaching that had been scattered all over Europe in libraries and collections in London, Paris, and St. Petersburg.


10. Ibid., p. 220.

11. Ibid., and Ōtani, “Sangai bōzenjigyōjō”


Korean Buddhist Nuns: An Historical Review

Gyehwan Sunim

When Buddhism first arrived on the Korean Peninsula, women received ordination and created the first community of bhikkhunīs, fully ordained Buddhist nuns. During that period, ordination procedures for bhikkhunīs almost died out in the other Buddhist nations of Northeast Asia. By contrast, when Koreans adopted Buddhism, they recognized women’s role and granted women the bhikkhunī precepts so that they could lead the life of fully dedicated practitioners.

The Buddhist community of bhikkhunīs, established in this way, still holds profound significance in Korean Buddhism. In fact, according to recent records of the Jogye order, more than half of the monastics (sunims) in the order are nuns, including bhikkhunīs and female Buddhist novices. Needless to say, this gender ratio clearly shows that bhikkhunīs play important roles in Korean Buddhism today. That is, more than half of the driving force for the development of the order comes from bhikkhunīs.

The bhikkhunīs’ standing in society, as women practitioners, is unique. This uniqueness results from the fact that bhikkhunīs play a significant role in spreading Buddhism in special, overlooked fields. These include social service work for the elderly, preschool education, education for the disabled, guidance to the children of single parents, spiritual direction for workers in shadowy occupations, Dharma instruction for women in farming and fishing villages, and counseling services for low-income urban working families. There are still more communities with needs to be addressed by bhikkhunīs.

This article looks at bhikkhunīs’ activities in Korean Buddhism from an historical perspective. It surveys bhikkhunīs’ activities in chronological order, from the era of Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla) Period when Buddhism was adopted, through the Goryeo Dynasty when Buddhism flowered, the Joseon Dynasty when it was oppressed, and finally, the modern day. It then reviews the roles and status of bhikkhunīs as the strength of Korean Buddhism yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Bhikkhunīs in the Era of the Three Kingdoms

Buddhism was introduced during the era of the Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla) and grew quite rapidly. However, in the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910 CE), the rulers oppressed Buddhism. It is not an exaggeration to say that it survived during that period thanks to the hidden efforts made by fully ordained bhikkhunīs and Buddhist laywomen. Records of the activities of bhikkhunīs since Buddhism was adopted are fragmentary. The very few records extant tell that the first bhikkhuni was Sa-ssi,1 the sister of Morye, who was a lay Buddhist of Shilla. Morye helped Master Ado, who introduced Buddhism to Silla, to spread the teachings in Ilsun Province, which is today’s Sunsan in the north of Gyeongsang-do, Korea.

During the Silla Dynasty (57 BCE-935 CE), the first person to be ordained in the history of Korean Buddhism was a woman. In other words, a bhikkhuni played a leading role in spreading Buddhism on the Korean Peninsula. After Sa-ssi was ordained and became a bhikkhuni, Queen Beopheung admired her spirit and became a bhikkhuni herself, taking the Buddhist name of Myobop. An article about King Jinheung in
the *Samguk-sagi*, or *History of the Three Kingdoms*, says that King Jinheung also was ordained and took the Buddhist name of Beop Un. Following in his footstep, Queen Jinheung became a bhikkhuni and lived in Yeongheung Temple.² Further, Yeol Jeon of *Samguk-sagi³* says that Jiso, the wife of General Kim Yu-sin, became a bhikkhuni after her husband died and she did some special chanting for him.

During the reign of King Jin Pyeong (681–692 CE), the eminent Buddhist monk Won Gwang returned from Sui-Dynasty China and established a foundation with the aim of holding Juhm-Chal Dharma ceremonies regularly. It is said that a bhikkhuni donated a plot of land for this purpose. Ji Hye, a bhikkhuni at Anhung Temple, is also said to have held a Juhm-Chal Dharma ceremony every year. The *Samguk-yusa⁴* shows that during the reign of King Sin Mun (681–692 CE), it was a bhikkhuni that cured Gyeong Heung Dae Deok, who was then the master of the country.

As activities by bhikkunis markedly increased in the society, the royal family appointed a bhikkhuni named Ani to serve as Doyugunrang, an official post given to the head of the bhikkhuni community.⁵ After the arrival of Buddhism in Korea, when establishing a ranking system for monastics, the rulers created the post of Doyugurang just below Seungtong, the highest position for Buddhist monks during the Silla Dynasty. Extrapolating from these facts, we can see that the order of bhikkunis was fully established at that time. The fact that an official post responsible for the bhikkhuni order was in place is a proof that bhikkunis held a fairly high status in the society.

Meanwhile in 577 CE (the 24th year of the reign of King Wi Deok), during the Baekje Dynasty, records show that a delegation made up of a Tripitaka Master, a Zen Master, a bhikkhuni, and religious artisans carrying artifacts was sent to Japan. Another record in the *Nihonshoki* (Chronicles of Japan) shows that in 588 CE (the 35th year of the reign of King Wi Deok) three bhikkunis were ordained by a Gogureyo monk named Hye Pyeon and became the first to be ordained in Japan. The record says that they later studied Vinaya for three years in Baekje.⁶ In 655 CE (the 15th year of the reign of King Ui Ja), a bhikkhuni named Beop Myeong made her way to Japan. She read the *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sūtra* (Discourse of Vimalakirti) to the sick and healed them. These records well illustrate that bhikkunis played a significant role in adopting and developing Buddhism.⁷

The *Nihonshoki* also shows that in 687 CE (the first year of Empress Jitō) a delegation composed of 22 bhikkhus, bhikkunis, and many laypeople of Silla settled down in Musasino-kuni, which is today’s Tokyo area.⁸ The *Genkoushakusho* (History of Japanese Buddhism)⁹ tells us that in 757 CE (the first year of Tempyo), bhikkhus and bhikkunis from Silla were engaged in activities to spread the Buddhism in the Silla District, where the teachings were established for the first time in Musasino.

Although these records do not give specifics, they imply that bhikkunis were actively involved in fostering the spread of Buddhism at home and abroad from the time of the Three Kingdoms Period. In particular, Bhikkhunī Hyeon Won’s presence in the *Manyoshu¹⁰* (Japanese Anthology of Poems) shows that bhikkunis from the Peninsula were involved in spreading the teachings in Japan.

To summarize, bhikkunis’ activity in the Three Kingdoms, not only queens and the aristocracy, but also court ladies, chamberlains, and ordinary women were ordained and contributed to popularizing Buddhism.

**Bhikkunis in the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392 CE)**

After the Three Kingdoms period, the Goryeo Dynasty ruled the country. The royal family designated Buddhism as the national religion and implemented pro-Buddhist policies. As Buddhism evolved, it came to be regarded as a religion with the power to defend the nation, so this era was the golden age for Buddhism on the Korean Peninsula. Naturally, the number of temples and priests increased dramatically.

Along with the aristocracy and commoners, some of the royal family were ordained during this era¹¹ and many great monks came to the fore during this period. Monastics were exempted from the payment of taxes and public labor. Accordingly, many people ordained as a Buddhist monks to achieve social status
and as a means to climb the social ladder. These monastics encouraged the laypeople’s faith in Buddhism as religious leaders. Meanwhile, temples served as places for practice. Bhikkunis, in particular, volunteered to provide medical services for the ill and temples were used as a place of recuperation and mourning for Buddhists. This expanded the role of the temples from religious, academic, and educational institutions to include medical services.

An exemplary Goryeo Dynasty bhikkuni was Master Jin Hye. According to the rank system of monks during the Goryeo era, a master had a higher status among other great monks, and only those with a high level of scholastic performance and high moral repute were qualified for that post. Thus, the fact that a bhikkuni was granted this post was unconventional and unprecedented at that time. This reflects the extent to which bhikkunis were immersed in pursuing the study of texts and engaging in ascetic practices.

Among the bhikkunis who devoted themselves to ascetic practices were Seong Hyo or Master Jin Hye (1255–1324), Jong Min, Cheong Won, Yo Yeon and Hui Won. These bhikkunis participated in the summer training period at Su Seon Temple and received recognition from National Master Hye Sim. Bhikkuni Hwa Eom, who was the disciple of Na Ong, also received recognition. She was given a wooden board with Eom Gok calligraphy on it from Mu Hak as well. In May 1381 (the 7th year of the reign of King Woo) a bhikkuni claimed to be the embodiment of Maitreya, the future Buddha, and actively engaged in religious activities. Impressed by her manners and ways, many people converted to Buddhism. This episode indicates that bhikkunis were active in spreading Buddhism to many people during this era.

There are also some records that suggest that bhikkunis, in cooperation with bhikkhus, forged associations such as Manbulhoi and contributed to making Buddhism popular. While actively engaging in propagating Buddhism to the people through these associations, bhikkunis promised the people that when they died they would have an easy and painless death by chanting and reciting the sutras.

In the late Goryeo dynasty era, the names of disciples such as Ji Gong, Na Ong, and Bo U were included in the biographies of great masters. Along with bhikkhus’ name, quite a large number of bhikkunis’ names were included in these biographies. Presumably, the number has something to do with the positions held by Goryeo bhikkunis.

At the end of Goryeo era, there was a Buddhist whose pen name was Baekun and whose Dharma name was Kyunghan. He wrote Jikji, the oldest metal printed book extant in the world today, and also published an xylographic book entitled, The Analects of Baekunhwasa. The publication served as a breakthrough in the dissemination of knowledge and information, and was a turning point in the development of printing. It was a bhikkuni named Myo Deok, who donated money to finance the publication of this work.

It is assumed that a number of bhikkunis, in addition to the bhikkunis mentioned above, dedicated themselves to the improvement of Buddhism and Goryeo society. Unfortunately, there are almost no detailed written historical records about the activities of bhikkunis. Probably this is because historians of the early days of Joseon Dynasty compiled history books from the Confucian perspective. In other words, the social and political atmosphere did not allow bhikkunis’ activities to be evaluated correctly and thus recording their activities was even more unlikely.

Bhikkunis in the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910 CE)

The establishment of the Joseon Dynasty not only diminished the political and economic influence of Buddhism, but also actively oppressed it. As Buddhism was limited in scope in expressing its religious character, it gradually became alienated from the masses. During this era, politicians implemented a policy for Buddhism founded on the political ideology of promoting Confucianism and oppressing Buddhism. It was natural that Buddhism was confined by that policy. However, at the same time, this era was an opportunity for Buddhism to pursue a new direction and renew itself.

On the one hand, the kings of the Joseon Dynasty usually did not change the institutions or practices of
their predecessors in order to comply with their wishes. Accordingly, the royal family’s customs and practices tended not to undergo frequent changes. Due to these patterns, Buddhism barely survived the oppressive atmosphere. Yet on the other hand, the establishment of *won dangs*, temples for prayer, contributed to the survival of Buddhism during this era.

During the early Joseon Dynasty, *won dangs* were located in noted mountains and large Buddhist monasteries near the capital city. However, royal families did not have free access to the *won dangs* and it was even more difficult for them to frequent *won dangs* located in mountain areas far away from the royal palace. This inconvenience prompted people to build *won dangs* within the capital city limits. One of these, called Jeong-eop Won, was a monastery dedicated to *bhikkhunīs* only and was representative of Joseon Dynasty *bhikkhuni* monasteries.

Records also show that during the regency of Queen Mun Jeong (1545-1553) as many as 5,000 *bhikkhunīs* practiced asceticism at *bhikkhuni* monasteries such as Jasu Won and Insu Won, which indicates that there were quite a few *bhikkhunīs* of high moral repute. Although some members of the royal family were interested in Buddhism, in general the royal household was fully involved in the policy of oppression and control launched by the government against Buddhism. As a result, the Buddhist community had to face many difficulties. Later Jasu Won and Insu Won were destroyed, and the *bhikkhunīs* were expelled from the capital city.

However, *bhikkhunīs* were able to engage in social activities again once the royal family allowed easier access to the capital city. This led Bhikkhunī Gim Suyeong, who at the time lived in Naewon temple, to donate her personal savings and build a temple. Bhikkhunī Hong Sanggeun contributed a large amount of rice to Yu Jeom temple to hold a special assembly. Some members of the royal family appealed for favor to Buddhism and *bhikkhunīs* played the role of mediator between the temples and the royal family. By encouraging members of the royal family to hold Buddhist events or make offerings to temples, *bhikkhunīs* were a catalyst for the survival and development of Buddhism amid the ruling class’s policy of encouraging Confucianism and oppressing Buddhism.

**Bhikkhunīs in the Modern Day**

These days, *bhikkhunīs* are not only devoted to practicing asceticism, but are also involved in activities such as Buddhist studies, protection of temples, and social service. Besides dedicating themselves to practicing Seon meditation and studying in the traditional lecture halls and temples, nowadays an increasing number of *bhikkhunīs* are pursuing academic work at domestic universities or abroad. *Bhikkhunīs* also run Buddhist centers and kindergartens in the cities and are actively engaged in social work.

Today, *bhikkhunīs* are widely accepted and highly recognized in various fields of society. It is no exaggeration to say that the Buddhist community would lose its competitive edge if it failed to tap into the considerable human resources of the *bhikkhunīs*.

Here are some numbers to back up this statement. Currently, among 16,000 fully ordained priests of the Jogye Order, about half are *bhikkhunīs*. Specifically, during the summer training season in 2003, there were 940 *bhikkhunīs* among 2,159 people who gathered from 91 temples across the nation. Among those who are studying at academic institutes, 895 of the total are *bhikkhus* and male novices, whereas 887 are *bhikkhunīs* and female novices. In last year’s 24th and 25th postulant education sessions, male applicants stood at 302 and female applicants at 185. These figures show that women account for nearly half of the total monastics.

In addition, there are fairly large number of *bhikkhunīs* involved in various Buddhist activities: pursuing Buddhist Studies, teaching at education institutions, doing volunteer work at hospitals and welfare facilities, fulfilling their duties in the order, serving as heads of temples, and taking up posts such as chief nun, director, teacher, temple treasurer. In all these ways, nuns are devoting themselves to protecting temples and
spreading Buddhism to the general public.

In recent years, the Buddhist community enhanced the monastic certification exam, which had previously been a titular one. Last year 199 male novices and 174 female novices applied for Level Four of the exam; among them, 173 male novices and 172 female novices passed. For Level Three, there were 218 bhikkhu and 196 bhikkhunī applicants; among them, 156 and 164 respectively passed the exam. The total number of successful applicants, standing at 345 for Level Four and 320 for Level Three, shows that the exam has made a great strides in establishing ranks in the order.

There are currently about 80 bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs who are teaching at lecture halls, and about 60 bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs teaching at Buddhist academies or at Dongguk University. As these numbers show, bhikkhunīs in Korea are engaged in ascetic practices, propagation work, and educational activities in virtually every field where monastics are active.

Demands for women have gradually increased in relation to industrialization. Development of a knowledge-based information society is pushing the demand for women even higher. Demand is rising for people who are sensitive and respect diversity, including full inclusion for women, who account for half the total population, and for bhikkhunīs, who make up half the Buddhist monastic community. These changes call for bhikkhunīs in Korea to take on more duties in new fields.

Conclusion

The principle goals of Buddhism are to perfect the individual to help perfect others and attain Buddhahood. With this in mind, it can be assumed that the life goals of bhikkhunīs fall into the same category. Likewise, based on this assumption, the activities of bhikkhunīs activities can be divided into two: (1) practicing asceticism to perfect oneself as a monastic, and (2) working to disseminate the Buddhist teachings among the general public.

Since the time when Buddhism was introduced to the Korean Peninsula, bhikkhunīs have played their part in the society along with bhikkhus, living up to their Buddhist responsibilities socially and religiously. During the Silla Dynasty, there were both queens and kings that received ordination and devoted themselves seriously to practicing asceticism. This allows us to understand the high standing of religious practice and also the high social status of certain bhikkhunīs in Silla society. During the Goryeo Dynasty also, under the patronage of the royal family, a number of bhikkhunīs were engaged in asceticism and the spread of Buddhism, making dedicated efforts to improve Goryeo society. During the Joseon dynasty, the policy followed was one of promoting Confucianism and oppressing Buddhism. Despite such an unfavorable atmosphere, the royal family’s interest in Buddhism enabled bhikkhunīs to serve as a bridge between the temples and the royal family, which worked to the advantage of the Buddhist community. These activities attest to the outstanding roles bhikkhunīs have played in Korean society.

Today bhikkhunīs need to emulate the renowned spirit of preceding generations of bhikkhunīs presented above. They need to demonstrate their abilities as practitioners, transmitters of Dharma, builders and guardians of Buddhist temples, and practitioners of great compassion. In this way, they can establish a worthy place for themselves in society.

NOTES


7. *Genkoushakusho*, Vol. 18, says that in 656 CE (the second year of Emperor Saimei) Bhikkhu Beop Myeong was widely known for her treatment of a vassal in Japan.


11. King Gong Min's wife Queen Sin and Queen Yeom became bhikkunis after the king's death.

12. “Epitaph of Huh, the Wife of GimByeon,” (*Compilation of Goryeo Epitaphs* (Institute of Asia Culture Studies, Hallym University 1996)).

13. There were two categories of official posts for priests in Buddhist sects. Monastics of the Zen sect were promoted, in order, to Great Monk, Master, Jung Master, Samjung Master, Zen Master, and Great Immortal Teacher. Monastics of the Gyo Jong sect were promoted, in order, to the posts of Great Monk, Master, Jung Master, Samjung Master, Head Monk, and Supreme Monk.

14. “Quotations of National Master Chogye Jingak,” *Korea Buddhism Compendium* 6, 28:1. This shows that in 1213 she attended the summer training period at Su Seon Temple for 90 days.

15. Such a wooden board is known as a “hanging board” in Korean. I Saek, “Record on Eom Gok,” *Mok Eun Compilation*.


19. *Mun Jeongsilrok* or *the Journals of King Myeong Jong*, Vol. 18, says bhikkunis who were under the patronage of by Queen Mun jeong were seated alongside the queen.


22. Ibid.
Activities of Korean Buddhist Laywomen: An Historical Review

Changsook Lee

The Buddha accepted women in the Buddhist order and accorded them an equal position with men in the spiritual world. In this connection, Buddhism transformed women’s lives in India, and later changed women’s lives in Korea as well when Buddhism was introduced there via China. From the earlier days of its arrival in Korea, Buddhism, which nurtured their spiritual potential, was passionately embraced by women. Based on that spiritual strength, women helped Buddhism take root in society as a religion to be practiced in daily life and continued to defend and support Buddhist activities when the royal families suppressed it. In the Buddhist history of Korea, devout Buddhist women played a significant roles consistent with the period in which they lived. They laid a firm foundation for the true Dharma and for the right teachings to flourish. As a result, Buddhism has endured to provide spiritual guidance up to the present time. This article examines the roles that women have played throughout Buddhist history in Korea and the tasks facing women today.

Women’s Roles in the Assimilation of Buddhism in the Three Kingdoms and United Silla Periods

Buddhism was introduced in the Korean peninsula in 372 CE, the second year of the reign of King Sosurim in Goguryeo. As Buddhism spread during the eras of the Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla) and United Silla (Goryeo and Joseon), the character of Buddhism evolved. The status and roles of women within Buddhism, and the forms of worship, evolved as time went by. Women’s status in Buddhism was at its highest during the era of the Three Kingdoms, involving Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla, when they engaged in various Buddhist activities. During the era of the Three Kingdoms, royal families took the lead in adopting Buddhism and promoting it as a spiritual foundation in the establishment of a centralized governing structure. With this royal patronage, women in the Silla royal family played a progressive and important role in accepting Buddhism from the earliest days of its arrival.

During the United Silla period, King Beopheung proclaimed Buddhism to be the state religion. When he built Heungnyun shrine and became a monk, the queen also became a nun and founded Yeongheung Temple. These events occurred less than eight years after Buddhism received royal approval, which demonstrates the queen’s devotion to Buddhism and the status of the new religion in the Silla Kingdom. The next queen, the wife of King Jinheung, followed this example; she also become a Buddhist nun and lived in Yeongheung temple. The two queens set an example for future Silla women and many became Buddhist nuns in this era.

It is notable that the Śrīmālādevī Sūtra was introduced to the Silla Kingdom, serving as a model of faith for upper class women. Queen Śrīmālā is the main character in this sūtra, which was introduced by Master Anhong in 576 CE (the 37th year of King Jinheung, Silla). Two Silla queens took their names from
this character: Queen Seondeok's name was Deongman and Queen Jindeok's name was Sungman, both of which are Korean forms of the name Śrīmālā. Queen Śrīmālā was an exemplary model for laywomen and the fact that her name was used by the royal family of Silla shows the great regard in which she was held. She was especially famous for her wisdom and compassion (karunā) and so became a shining example for queens to come.

Among the three queens of the Silla Dynasty, the personality of Queen Seondeok particularly brings to mind the image of Queen Śrīmālā. Queen Seondeok founded temples such as Bunhwang Temple and Yeongmyo Temple, and built the nine-storied wooden pagoda of Hwangnyong Temple. She held worship assemblies in which followers read the Benevolent King Sutra (Inwang kyong) and she sent Master Jajang to the Tang empire in China to find and bring back Buddhist texts. Along with this kind of Buddhist patronage, she expressed the same kind of Mahāyāna bodhisattva actions as Queen Śrīmālā in the sūtra, exhorting others through the ten bodhisattva vows, listening to the needy, and granting clemency to prisoners.

Silla historical reports show that not only upper-class women, but also slaves, played a leading role in women being ordained, as shown in the fifth volume of the Chronicle of the Three Kingdoms (Samguk Yusa). As nuns, women helped in various capacities, sometimes teaching disciples and at other times playing major roles as enlightened masters, as recorded in the third and fifth volumes of Samguk Yusa. As mothers, women encouraged their sons to become monks (fifth volume) and made blind children open their eyes (third volume). In these ways, the various roles women played are documented, thus from the Buddhist point of view, women played equal roles with their male counterparts.

**Buddhist Practice in the Daily Life of Women of the Goryeo Dynasty**

Buddhism, originally a foreign religion, was incorporated into the lives of ordinary Koreans as it was assimilated during the Three Kingdoms and United Silla periods, serving as a universal religion. There were three clauses in the Ten Injunctions (Hunyo Sipcho) written by King Taejo of Goryeo that encouraged people to practice Buddhism. Buddhism maintained this strong tradition as the state religion during the Goryeo Dynasty as well. Many nationwide events centered around Buddhism. In times of national difficulties, the rulers were committed to overcoming their problems with the power of the Buddha. Goryeo women were not rigorously bound by the law, which had previously denied women access to temples, and actively attended Buddhist ceremonies.

In 1016 CE, the eighth year of King Hyeonjong, the government banned women from taking part in Buddhist events because there were too many cases of women donating their houses and valuables and becoming nuns. Nevertheless, Buddhism continued to be a religion generally practiced by Goryeo women, who continued textual study and chanting at home. While there is no written record of ordinary women's lives, epitaphs of upper-class women carefully describe the religious lives of women of the time, which leads us to infer that ordinary women must have also practiced Buddhism in a similar way. For example, in everyday life it was indispensable to recite Buddhist texts at dawn. People always cited the specific sūtras that they read, noting that they recited the Sukhavati-vyuha Sūtra, the vow of practice of Samantabhadra of Buddhavatamasaka Sūtra, the Thousand Eyes and Hands Dharmi Sūtra, the Vajracchedika Prajñāpāramitā, or the Diamond Sūtra. Among the sūtras, the Buddhavatamasaka Sūtra was one of the most popular and commonly read.

With regard to chanting, many people were inclined to Pure Land, the practice of Amitbha. Records also show that some people recited the name of Avalokiteśvara. In most cases, the name of Avalokiteśvara was recited at the deathbed. Words inscribed in epitaphs mention this practice: “After taking bath and changing clothes, I asked my children and relatives to take care of affairs after my death. Then I placed my palms together (anjali mudrā) and recited the name of Avalokiteśvara.” Another common practice among devout Buddhist women followers seems to have been receiving ordination from a monk, asking him to shave the
head, and requesting a Dharma name before dying. The spiritual potential of Goryeo women is described in such words as, “I practiced Buddhism faithfully and recited sūtras throughout my life. Now, although my face is pale due to illness and imminent death, my spirit is sound because I put all mundane thoughts out of my mind while reciting sūtras.”

Women stringently adhered to the Buddhist precepts (sīla) and some women even followed the training rule that suggests fasting after midday. Epitaphs show that some women also received the Mahāyāna precepts. It was very common for Buddhist women to encourage one or two sons among many to be ordained and offered handmade socks to monks when Buddhist memorial services were held. Funeral ceremonies were consistently held in a Buddhist fashion and cremations were conducted at nearby temples. Epitaphs show that Goryeo women believed in the wheel of existence (bhāva-chakra), wished for rebirth in Amitābha’s Pure Land (Sukhavati), and practiced the six perfections (pāramitā), such as generosity (dāna), morality (sīla), and determination (virya) in their daily lives.

Joseon Women as Defenders of Buddhism

In the Joseon Dynasty, Confucianism, which put emphasis on patriarchal social ethics, was adopted as the guiding set of principles for management of the state and moral decorum. Women from all walks of life were isolated from political and social activities, and their rights gradually diminished. During the first century of the Joseon Dynasty, the ruling class focused on establishing a Confucian perspective on women, which made women’s access to temples a major issue. The royal family banned women’s visits to temples based on their conviction that those visits were a threat to Confucian virtues. In 1418 CE, the eleventh year in the reign of King Sejong, the king enacted laws that prohibited women’s frequenting of temples as well as visits by monks to widow’s houses. Buddhism lost its political and social influence. During the reign of King Taejong eleven orders were reduced to seven orders, while during the reign of King Saejong the seven orders were integrated into two orders consisting of meditation (dhyāna) and doctrine (sūtra study). In addition, monks were banned from entering the capital city, and during the reign of King Jungjong the civil service examination for monks was abolished.

Despite such unfavorable conditions, women tended to follow Buddhism rather than Confucianism. The more they were forced to follow patriarchal ethics and to disengage from sociopolitical activities, the more they pursued the spiritual peace and enlightenment that Buddhism offered. Despite continuous suppression and regulation by the royal family, women took the initiative in practicing Buddhism and in participating in Buddhist rituals, which helped to sustain Buddhism until the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty. After King Taejong ascended to the throne, he said, “I already prohibited Buddhist affairs held across the nation, but it is not easy to root out the practice all together, as women within the palace continue to worship the Buddha, hold Buddhist rituals for the departed, and use their private fortunes in the hope of prolonging their son’s life.” His confession vividly shows the strength of women’s yearning for the Buddha-mind and how impossible it was to diminish their fervor despite the power of the king. Afterwards, King Sejong actually punished women who violated the law prohibiting women’s visits to temples, but even this could not stop them.

During the Joseon Dynasty, women from the royal family took the lead in defending Buddhism. During the rule of King Sungjong, Queens Insu and Inhye issued a royal directive in which they defended Buddhism, saying “Predecessors could not drive out Buddhism because they were afraid that it might trigger dissension among the people.” This directive served as a tacit approval of Buddhism. Queen Munjong, who was regent to the young King Myoungjong, promoted Buddhism as part of a political drive. She resuscitated the civil service examination for monks, restored dilapidated temples, and made sure that certified monks who were once prohibited were recognized once again. However after the death of Queen Munjong, these
efforts to revive Buddhism were reversed and the situation went back to the way it was before the queen. Nevertheless, Queen Minjong’s efforts were by no means in vain, for the civil service examination for monks that she reinstated generated one of the most revered monks in the Joseon era, Master Seosan, thereby making it possible for Buddhism to be handed on to future generations.

For 500 years, Buddhism was oppressed. During that time, the social status of monks was demoted and they were relegated to the lowest class of citizens, while temples became more and more dilapidated. The monks of Joseon Buddhism retreated into the mountains and gradually formed the Dhyāna (Seon) sect of Buddhism, while Amitābha Buddhist practice flourished among ordinary people. Men, who were the superior class of society, distanced themselves from Buddhism because it was banned by the royal family, but women remained keen supporters of Buddhism until the latter part of the Joseon period. How could Buddhism have survived 500 years of oppression without the continued support of women, ranging from members of the royal family to those of humbler origins, and all the donations they made to keep the temples running? In the early days of the Joseon Dynasty, women nurtured their faith in the form of Buddhist rituals for the dead and for staving off disasters, but as the royal family’s oppression to any openly held Buddhist ceremonies became stronger, Joseon women wisely responded by reciting sūtras and doing mantra meditation in their own homes.

It is regrettable that women Buddhist practitioners did not engage in Buddhist activities more enthusiastically from the latter part of the Joseon Dynasty up to today. Buddhist women led and actively participated in a series of movements organized after independence from Japanese colonial rule, such as the National Debt Repayment Campaign in 1907, the Joseon Young Women’s Buddhist Association for the education of women which was founded in 1922, and the Prajna Women’s Association and the Mahabodhi Society, but these movements lacked systematic organization and so their efforts were not sustainable. I do not think this problem is confined to Buddhist women. During this period, Buddhists worked hard to discover their Buddhist identity after suffering the fallout of five hundred years of oppression and so the Buddhist order experienced problems during this era.

Challenges Facing Buddhist Women in Modern Times

Today, women account for 80 percent of lay Buddhist practitioners in Korea and play a leading role in protecting temples. Although practicing Buddhism in the forms of textual study, Zen meditation, reciting sūtras, and mantra meditation is suited to them, women also actively participate in Buddhist ceremonies and volunteer work. It is no exaggeration to say that women kept Korean Buddhism alive during all the years of oppression. However, they mainly prayed for happiness and had a shallow understanding of the teachings and philosophies of Buddhism. On top of that, chauvinistic attitudes persist in society and especially in the Buddhist orders in Korea still today.

Since the first Year of Women, designated by the United Nations in 1975, Korean women’s standing in both the political and social arenas has improved, thanks to women’s painstaking efforts over the past 30 years. In contrast to such advancements, Buddhist women’s participation in feminist movements has been feeble. I think the reason behind this is the absence of strong women leaders and the lack of systematic participation. In the year 2000, the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute was established and began its services as an official organization for women Buddhists under the Joyge order, the largest order in Korea. While it is premature to evaluate the institute’s achievements, I look forward to the time when women assume an equal share in society and plays a greater role in forging a true identity for Buddhist women.

As mentioned above, Buddhist women in Korea have ancestors that they can take pride in. However, if the achievements of these predecessors remain simply achievements of the past, they will not be significant for today’s world. Today Buddhist women must practice Buddhism as befits the present era and the task before us is to put this obligation into action. In this context, I would like to present five tasks that should
be taken up by Buddhist women and the Buddhist orders of today.

First and foremost, we need to establish a true identity for Buddhist women. To that end, it is important to properly construe putting faith in Buddhism. Simply put, we must have faith and practice in accordance with the true Dharma to achieve enlightenment.

Second, Buddhist orders should embrace Buddhist women based on gender equality and this should apply to both nuns and laywomen. With regard to nuns, a system should be established that is true to the Mahāyāna teachings, so that the eight special rules or garudhamma will not be made a special issue. At the same time lay women practitioners should be encouraged to serve as donors and as equal in the quest for the highest achievement of Buddhism.

Third, a program of systematic education for Buddhist women should be instituted. Even temples that teach the Buddha’s ideas have a tendency to avoid teachings that encourage enlightenment on the part of women. However, Buddhism can distance itself from being a religion that prays for blessings alone. Buddhist women can restore their identity through a correct recognition of the roles and achievements of women in Buddhism.

Fourth, Buddhist women’s voices should be heard. Women themselves should move away from their traditionally passive attitude and the Buddhist order should not block their voices from being heard.

Fifth, Buddhist women’s organizations, including the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute, should take a leading role in eliminating elements of gender discrimination that are still found in the Buddhist orders in Korea. Buddhist women’s organizations should play an active role in enhancing women’s status and at the same time join hands with civic groups, women’s organizations of other religions, and other women’s organizations in resolving problems concerning women, politics, and society.

Conclusion

In the 1600 years of Buddhist history in Korea, it was Buddhist women who kept Buddhism going. From the early days of its introduction to Korea, women actively accepted Buddhism and contributed to planting the roots of Buddhism in their daily lives. During the era of the Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo, Baekje and Silla) upper-class women took the lead in embracing Buddhism, thereby serving as exemplary models for ordinary women and faithfully following the teachings of the sūtras. There are records that women became enlightened during the United Silla period. During the Goryeo Dynasty, when Buddhism became the state religion, women practiced Buddhism in their daily lives and strengthened their spiritual growth. During the Joseon era, when Buddhism was greatly oppressed, women supported and protected Buddhism, which was continually diminished in size, and thus played essential roles in maintaining the monks and the temples.

In light of these achievements and all these devout and distinguished Buddhist predecessors, where do Buddhist women stand today? Since the eighteenth century, when Catholicism and Protestantism were introduced, Korea has been transformed into a multi-religious society. It cannot be denied that the activities of Buddhist women diminished in the process. Now, however, Buddhist women are called upon to carry on the work of those who have gone before and restore their status as befits today’s world. Therefore, the tasks before Buddhist women in modern Korea are, as individual practitioners, to hold firmly to their identity as Buddhist women and to practice Buddhism based on the true Dharma. They must learn to voice their opinions and enhance their status, thereby contributing to the development of both Buddhism and society in general.
NOTES

1. Queen Śrīmālā established the ten vows that exhort the bodhisattva to abide by ethical teachings. In the Śrīmālādevī Sūtra, the ten vows are summarized in three large parts and emphasize following the true Dharma teachings only.

2. More than 50 kinds of Buddhist ceremonies and over 1300 articles on rituals are referred to in Goryeo history. There were Buddhist ceremonies of various kinds such as wishing for happiness, staying off disasters, reciting sūtras, repenting, receiving the precepts, holding rituals for the deceased, and offering food to monks by members of the royal household.

3. Among the 40 epitaphs of Goryeo women referred to in Comprehensive Bibliography on Stone Monuments in the Joseon Dynasty and Handbook of Monumental inscriptions of Korea, as many as 26 epitaphs show devout faith in Buddhism.

4. Epitaph of Madame Kim in Gangneun-gun, in 1148 CE (in the third year of the reign of King Uijong, Goryeo).

5. Epitaph of Leeilnang in 1171 CE (the second year of King Myoungjong, Goryeo).

6. Epitaph of Kim (King Gojeong 1213-1259 CE).

7. Epitaph of Madame Bak in Muan-gun in 1317 CE (the fifth year of King Chungsuk).

8. Epitaphs of Madame Choi in Nankang-gun in 1308 CE (the first year of King Chungsun), Madame Yoo in Musong-gun in CE 1315 (the third year of King Chungsuk), and Madame Bak in Muan-gun.

9. Epitaph of Madame Lee in Pyongyang-gun in 1166 CE (the 21st year of King Uijong)

10. Epitaph of Madame Huh in Yandchun-gun in 1323 CE (the eleventh year of King Chungsuk).


14. Clause 25 in the entry for November, The Annals of King Sungjong, Vol. 271, 1003 CE (the 23rd year of King Sungjong). When Queens Insu and Inhye issued this royal directive defending Buddhism, and Queen Munjong made efforts to revive Buddhism by selecting Monk Bowoo, for a month not a day went by without appeals against this decision. However, the queens responded to such opposition in a resolute manner.
Nun Palmo: A Legend Across Tibetan Communities

Ivette Vargas

During one of the most auspicious times of the Tibetan cultural world, *sagadawa* (the fourth lunar month), many Tibetans (and other ethnic groups) in Nepal, Tibet, and India prepare their belongings to take with them and stay at the local monastery or temple where the annual fasting ritual is held. They recite prayers to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Spyan ras gzigs), make prostrations, circumambulate the local sacred sites, give offerings to officiating lamas, and vow to fast for the prescribed period of time. Some monastics and laypeople retell the story of a leprous nun (Dge slong ma Dpal mo) who was healed by a fasting ritual and who appeared at other times and places for their sake.

Who was this leprous nun? Why has her story and mode of practice been transmitted for so many centuries? Why does it still mesmerize the minds and bodies of Tibetans and others in nearby communities to this day? Although we do not know whether Nun Palmo was an historical person, her image and tradition live on. This study explores the origins of this figure and how her famed fasting ritual relates to Buddhist conceptions of illness as religious experience.

Studies in anthropology and religion, as well as independent scholars and practitioners of Buddhism from the late 1960s to the present, have generated the seeds for this study. Most of their works have focused exclusively on the fasting ritual associated with this nun, while a few have focused on the link between the performative aspects of the ritual and oral versions of the hagiography of Nun Palmo. For the most part, however, previous Western scholarship has examined the fasting ritual for its doctrinal and ritual significance, disembodied from the story of its founder in the texts.¹

Finding her Identity Through the Sources

Nun Palmo is an elusive figure, since concrete information about her life is sparse and no systematic study has been conducted. There is no conclusive evidence of her being an historical figure or a conflation of historical and fictional characters. What we can rely upon are the images extracted from hagiographic materials, hymns of praise in the Tibetan canon, rituals texts, references of her in diverse Tibetan historical texts, and her reputed remains. The purpose of this essay, however, is not to make any definitive conclusions about this figure from the evidence we do have, but to glean from it some image of the icon she became in diverse times, places, and people’s imagination. My concern is: What are the patterns that we see from the textual sources in particular that give us an image of a figure that made such a critical impact on Tibetan history?

The main texts that belong to what I am calling the Nun Palmo system, provide some information about the identity and fasting ritual of this nun that has been known for centuries. For this brief study, a few select primary sources as well as historical accounts have been consulted. The main texts in this study belong to the genres of hagiographies (*rnam thar*), ritual texts of propitiation (*sgrub thabs, sādhanā*), fasting (*smyung gnas*), and hymns of praise (*bstod pa, stotra/stava*). The texts consulted include: (1) *Smyung gnas bla ma bryug pa’i*...
In the hagiographies dating from as early as the 14th century to the present day, Nun Palmo appears with several names and in a variety of guises. Prior to her renunciation, she is referred to as princess Lakṣminkara, and after her healing experience, as Rdo rje Phag mo. She is also referred to as a dge slong ma (indicating that she was a bhikṣuṇī, a fully ordained nun), sprul sku (a reincarnate being), mkha’ grub ma (ḍākinī), and rnal byor ma (yoginī). As revealed by these titles, she is a conglomeration of figures, from one of royal background and renunciation to one of advanced spiritual attainments. Thus, she was special, taking on forms from human to divine because of her karmic attainments in the past. As is typical of Buddhist texts, she undergoes spiritual development and this, in turn, affects her social and religious status. As is typical of tantric texts, the concepts of nonduality, emptiness, and skillful means come to play. Nun Palmo is represented as both human and divine, affirming that there is no difference between samsāra and nirvāṇa.

But where does Nun Palmo come from? Nun Palmo’s place of origin is not clear from the texts. Many of the extant hagiographies themselves first describe Nun Palmo prior to her renunciation as a beautiful princess from Kha che (a Tibetan word referring to Kashmir or the valley of Srinagar) or Northern India. From the beginning, the texts, written in Tibetan, are situated in a Kashmiri or Indian Buddhist world viewed through Tibetan eyes. It is certain from historical, narrative, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence that Kashmir was the seat of immense intellectual Buddhist activity and practice, a crossroads for scholars and practitioners from many cultures for a number of centuries.

As is typical of many Tibetan Buddhist texts, Indic roots in a lineage of teachings legitimize the tradition and the texts in this study are no exception. Nun Palmo’s association with key Indian religious figures indicates her Indic roots. The hagiographies mention King Indrabhūti, perhaps one of the Indian mabāsiddhas. In one version of her life story, Indrabhūti appears as her fearful but compassionate brother, thinking of her welfare while he tries to persuade her to marry in order to appease any border conflicts and create peaceful relations with his neighbors. He also appears as a Buddhist practitioner. Other figures like King Dharmapāla appear, but it is unclear who this person was historically.

Within Tibetan cultural areas outside of Tibet proper, Nun Palmo’s place of origin is established. Among the Newars in Nepal, Nun Palmo is referred to as Śrimati, who is believed to have existed in the 10th century, and as Candrikanti. In the Dhaulagiri Zone of the North Mustang district, there is reference in one travel guide to an Ani Palmo Cave Settlement – a multi-storied underground monastery consisting of interconnected cells where a nun of Samdruling ate only stones and one grain of barley every eleven days. In a temple on Chobar Hill in Patan, Tibetans recount the story of a “Tibetan” Nun Palmo who appeared as a dancing mkha’ grub ma in the area where Adinātha Lokeśvara resides.

Tibetan historical and canonical sources complicate the matter of identity. The historical textual accounts of the Blue Annals supply some details about Nun Palmo and her link with Avalokiteśvara as well as information about her impressive lineage of fasting descendants:

The degree of propitiating Arya Avalokitesvara by performing the rite of fasting was preached by the Nun Lakshmi (dPal mo) personally blessed by Arya Avalokitesvara. She taught it to the pandita Ye shes bzung po (Jnanabhadra), blessed by her. He to Bal po (the Nepalese) Penaba, blessed by him. They were all saints (siddhas)....
Also there existed a lineage of the dmar-khrid (detailed exposition) of the cycle of the Great Merciful One (Mahākaruṇīka). The Nun Lakmi (dGe-slong ma dPal mo) imparted it to dPal gyi bzang po (shri bhadra). The latter on Rin chen bzang po who imparted it to Atisha.6

This text also notes that teachers of the Bka’ gdamspa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism surround Avalokiteśvara in a vision, demonstrating that this early lineage (dating back to the eleventh century) was indirectly associated with this bodhisattva and the Nun Palmo practice.

In terms of her possible existence a century earlier, the hymns of praise found in the Tibetan canon point to her appearance in Tibetan culture during the 6stan pa phyi dar period, the later dissemination of the Dharma. These texts were translated by the Indian master Atiśha (?982–?1054) and Lo tsawa Rin chen bzang po. The texts are briefly examined below.

However, the evidence above and other references may point to a much broader phenomenon of conflation. There may have been several women by the name of Palmo (Lakṣmī), which complicates the identity and dating of Nun Palmo. These figures include a nun, a Kashmiri woman who wrote the Anuttarayoga Tantras, a princess, a male or female Kashmiri scholar, and others. According to Indologist and Tibetologist Dragomir Dimitrov, there may have been five or more women by the name of Palmo who existed from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, as the Blue Annals and canonical accounts seem to indicate.7 Based on the sources discussed above, Nun Palmo (or at least her images, conflated or not) may have lived in the tenth or early eleventh century.

The existence of relics also illuminates Nun Palmo as a figure of religious historical importance. In his travelogue, Ka thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho records the existence of the relics of Nun Palmo in Zhwa lu monastery in Gtsang province, Tibet.8 These relics include one of her liver (sku mchün) inside an image of Thugs chen rgyal ba rgya mtsho (Mahākaruṇīka Jina Sāgara) and the other inside a medicine image (sman sku) of Avalokiteśvara (Spyan ras gzigs).9 The fact that one of the relics is found in a medicine image of this particular type of bodhisattva indicates a link with Nun Palmo’s illness experience, Avalokiteśvara’s association with healing, and Nun Palmo’s devotion to this deity; that is, she and her ordeal are associated with healing officially.

In addition to historical accounts and evidence of her relics, biographical, ritual, and canonical praise texts are relied upon for the most part for information on the identity of Nun Palmo.

Three Biographies on Nun Palmo and her Experiences

One of the earliest extant hagiographies is Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa’i rnam thar (The Hagiography of the Lineage Gurus of the Fasting Ritual) written by Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po. The entire collection of texts is 107 folios long (recto and verso), which includes the hagiography of Nun Palmo, a biography of the author by his student Bsod nams dar (1385–1444), a biography of Bsod nams dar by Btsun pa Chos kyi grags pa, and hagiographies of Nun Palmo’s lineage descendants of Tibetan and Nepalese origin. Only the first 60 folios are by Jo gdan. The Nun Palmo hagiography itself is seven folios long, with a publisher’s colophon on a separate folio.

Jo gdan is an author who may, because of his title jo gdan, be directly linked with a key figure in Tibetan Buddhist history, the Kha che Pan chen (Kashmiri scholar) Śribhadra (1127–1225), founder of a famous Vinaya ordination lineage and community, the latter of which became the basis of the “four communities” (tshogs pa bzhi). According to the colophon of this text, the story of Nun Palmo’s life was extracted from earlier accounts of her life. The hagiography begins with her royal life and contraction of leprosy after she became a learned nun. The text describes her suffering and her isolation. She learned that her tutelary
deity was Avalokśvara after she experienced a vision of her own father Indrabhūti, Mañjuśrī, and seven mkha’gro ma. Her vision of the latter revealed that she would become the head of their retinue. After having meditated and fasted before Ekādaśamukha (the Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara for a full year, her illness was shed “like the skin of a snake.” She was endowed with bodhicitta (enlightened attitude), and transformed obstacles and the eight nāgas (serpent-like beings) into protectors of the practice in the form of two bodhisattvas, Mahākaruṇika and Ekādaśamukha, respectively. Afterwards, she continued to fast and saw visions of her tutelary deity and other tantric deities, and eventually achieved the level of a bodhisattva. She finally appeared in Magadha as a dancing mkha’gro ma. She revealed herself as Vajrayoginī and blessed the people in the area, helping them achieve dngos grub (siddhi). The story ends with the statement that those who practice during sagadawa will end all obstacles and achieve dngos grub quickly.

The second hagiography is a modern, anonymous text published in 1953, titled Dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba’i chos gtim (The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: A Religious Discourse Which Gives Rise to Aversion in the [Mind] Stream). The text is 21 pages (not folios) long including the publisher’s colophon. This text contains detailed narrative accounts of Nun Palmo’s suffering with leprosy, her religious development, and that of her servant.

The identity of the author of this modern tale is problematic since no outside sources are available, except for what is provided by the colophon of the publisher, G. Tharchin in Kalimpong. He informs the reader that the text was published in 1953 to honor the bequest of a Bhutanese Bla ma Rab brtan. This lama, while hospitalized in Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital, made a request to have this version of the life of Nun Palmo published for future generations.

From the beginning, this text affirms Nun Palmo’s divine status; she is identified as the dākinī Rdo rje Phag mo and a sprul sku (emanation body) who appears for the sake of others. As in the previous text, she comes from a Kashmiri royal family, goes by the name of Lakśminikara, and has a brother called Indrabhūti. There is a detailed description of her rejection of her royal lineage and the offers of marriage she received from kings of several Asian countries, such as China, Afghanistan, Iran, and India, before she finally procures permission from her family to renounce lay life. After a few years of training as an ordained nun, during which time she excels in her studies and is even capable of leading a temple, she contracts leprosy at the age of 25. At this point she is thrown out of her temple by her fellow monastics because of her condition.

The narrative continues with elaborate descriptions of her servant Sampelma’s devotion to her mistress as Nun Palmo’s body deteriorates. After undertaking several journeys and even reaching the mountain of Byang Thang in Tibet, Nun Palmo requests her servant Sampelma to leave her to die in a retreat house built for her; however, her servant only agrees to leave on the condition that she return to her after a short period of time. After her servant leaves, Nun Palmo remains in a meditational state for 21 days until she receives a vision of the young 16-year-old Avalokiteśvara, who tells her to go to a temple to see an image of Ekadashamukha in order to receive dngos grub (spiritual attainments). Her brother Indrabhūti, who apparently has achieved high spiritual realization, then appears in a vision holding a long life consecration vase that contains ablution water for purifying leprosy. Indrabhūti convinces her to generate strength during this difficult time. Five mkha’gro ma (dākinī) appear and lead her to her tutelary deity.

As in the previous hagiography, Nun Palmo remains fasting and meditating in the presence of her deity, but this time she attains a rainbow body. After much supplication by her servant to the deities, Nun Palmo appears in the sky in front of her, along with five mkha’gro ma. Her servant also achieves a rainbow body. They then both return to help alleviate the suffering of the people of another temple.

Another text, titled Dge slong ma dpal mo rnam thar, is contained in a collection of texts called Thugs rje chen po brgyud pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba (A Jeweled Garland: The Hagiography of the Lineage Gurus of the Eleven-faced Great Compassionate One). The collection was written by the Rnying ma scholar ’Od dpag rdo rje. The hagiography is contained in pages 20-50. Although this version of the narrative is longer, many passages in this text parallel Jo gdan’s version.
As in Jo gdan’s text, Nun Palmo appears as the daughter of a King Indrabhūti, but in contrast to Jo gdan’s text, which specifically states that Indrabhūti was the king of Orgyan, she is known as Laksāmkāra and has a brother by the same name as the king. In this latter text, she is also desired by kings of several countries and receives offers of marriage. From the beginning, she contracts leprosy after being a learned nun. As in the other texts, she receives several visions of figures, including that of her father, who lead her to the same tutelary deity who helps her achieve dngos grub and become healed.

The Canonical Works: Ritual Texts and Hymns of Praise

The Sde dge edition of the Bstan ’gyur section of the Tibetan Buddhist canon lists five works attributed to Nun Palmo: a ritual of propitiation and four hymns of praise. These texts are titled Rje btsun ’phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug zhal bcu geig pa’i sgrub thabs (The Ritual of Propitiation of the Holy Lord Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara); ’Jig rten dbang phyug la bstd pa (Praise to the Lord of the World); Rje btsun thugs rje chen po la bstd pa (Praise to the Holy Great Compassionate One); and two texts of the same title: ’Phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi bstd pa (Praise to the Holy Lord Avalokiteśvara). One text states:

Moonlike mother of the Conquerors,  
Whose body is of a beautiful female deity,  
Homage to the six-syllable mantra,  
empty by nature,  
you [emerge] from emptiness  
with a woman’s form  
and discipline beings.11

This provocative passage points to another clue about the identity of Nun Palmo. This text, among others in the canon reflects, on one level, Nun Palmo’s religious devotion to Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Not only does this passage obviously reinforce a positive view of the female body, it is also significant for its use of the female gender in relation to Avalokiteśvara and Nun Palmo’s relationship to him. First, Avalokiteśvara is described as “zla ba’i ‘od ltar rgyal ba’i yum” (Moonlike Mother of the Conquerors), which is unusual since Avalokiteśvara is described as a woman, although male in this tradition (unlike Guanyin in China).

Second, note that the phrase “yig drug ma la phyag ’tshal lo” (homage to the six-syllable mantra) uses the feminine particle “ma” to feminize Avalokiteśvara’s mantra. Therefore, a question arises from this curious passage: Who “emerges from emptiness with a woman’s form?” This study contends that this passage contains more than a passive statement about the positive value of the bodhisattva reincarnating in a feminine form. In fact, the passage implies that Nun Palmo is identified with Avalokiteśvara, that is, she is this bodhisattva who appears in the world. As the hagiographies state, she is one who is “re-embodied in the body of a female for the sake of sentient beings”12 and who “showed the great wonder [of herself?] as Khasarpana.”13 This example and further discussion of Nun Palmo’s practice reveal much of the multi-faceted nature of this figure.

Fasting as An Ascetic Practice in the Nun Palmo Accounts

Nun Palmo’s association with fasting is paramount for our understanding of her place in Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions. Fasting as an ascetic ritual was critical to her healing experience. The closest Tibetan equivalent term for the word “asceticism” is dka’ thub, meaning “capable of [enduring] difficulties.”
In the Tibetan Buddhist traditions, practitioners challenge themselves on a physical and mental level for religious goals. In the story of Nun Palmo, the training in ascetic practice expressed through fasting and devotion completes the transformative, that is, healing process.

Fasting is a practice that is common in most religious traditions. Many motives are intermingled in both individual and collective fasts. As scholars have made clear in reference to the Christian, Hindu, and Newar traditions, fasting practice often attracts women. Fasting can be undertaken as religious preparation and intercession for union with the divine or for liberation, as purification of past transgressions or exorcism of evil spirits, as a penitential exercise or as a way of expressing mourning, as a means to coerce the gods or to ensure fertility, among many other reasons. It is common for fasting rituals to incorporate and intersect with a wide range of practices, both ritual and ethical. These practices include prescriptions and injunctions on worship, speech and silence, sleep, clothing, sexual activity, food, offering, story-telling, singing, the creation of a ritual act, and pilgrimage. They also incorporate devotional activities toward a particular deity and prescribed vows. The collected writings of many of Tibet’s great lamas include fasting rituals and many ritual texts concern fasting of some type and duration. Although there are several fasting rituals in the Tibetan tradition, the fasting ritual attributed to Nun Palmo is the one most often recited and practiced.

The Tibetan fasting ritual is one of many occasions in which lay people are permitted to participate by undertaking the ascetic vows incumbent upon monastics by practicing at the local monastery or temple and, in some instances, staying for some time in a monastic compound. Tibetans gather at the local monastery during specific time periods when, as is typical of Buddhists everywhere, they observe the eight vows or precepts, and spend the day praying, making offerings, and listening to religious discourses. This is also a social gathering.

As an ascetic ritual, the Tibetan fasting practice consists of disciplined and challenging exercises of self-denial, in which restrictions of food and speech are meant to assist the practitioner achieve a transformative state. The ascetic exercises in the Tibetan ritual are meant to reshape and transform the individual in body, speech, and mind. In advanced meditation practices, they are meant to affect a transformation into a purified being. Therefore, certain physical, verbal, and oral exercises need to be mastered. The practitioner performs a series of full-body or half-body prostrations in front of sacred images and sites, circumambulates these same items, and makes offerings. With restrictions on food and drink, including one’s saliva, the sense of control over one’s bodily functions and needs are enforced. Verbally, the practitioner must take a vow of silence, which entail chanting, reciting, and praying only the words of the Buddhas and prayers in praise of the lineage gurus of the particular community in question. On the mental level, the practitioner must visualize the deities in gradual increments until the practitioner and the deity are conjoined. Through these exercises, Nun Palmo (and the practitioner) is able to develop renunciation or literally aversion to samsāra (the cycle of rebirth) as well as to her physicality and previous ways of thinking about reality. A certain measure of ascetic self-denial was therefore a necessary step for Nun Palmo to undertake. Without this ascetic concentration of effort, the practitioner is at the mercy of exterior forces or her own emotions and moods, reacting rather than acting.

In the Nun Palmo texts, the practice of fasting interacts with devotion. Nun Palmo reveres a particular deity who will eventually lead her to an enlightened state. This devotional aspect also reflects the tantric element of the texts and the affirmative aspect of asceticism; that is, liberation comes in the form of engagement in the world and Nun Palmo and her deity are examples of such engagement. Note an example from the modern hagiography:

Doing the fast,
one day she [cut off] food.
one day, she [cut off] speech.
In meditation, she said the praises of the Holy One
with intense fortitude and diligence.  
Due to the compassion of the Holy One, 
Nun Palmo departed and attained the rainbow body.\textsuperscript{18}

The passage above stresses the intentionality of the act of fasting. Nun Palmo in this stage takes control of her healing process by actively engaging in an act of detachment in the form of fasting. She regains her sense of agency, which in effect transforms her situation. The passage also shows that she attained a high level of spiritual attainment by achieving the rainbow body.

In another passage, Nun Palmo states, “I am sick for the sake of sentient beings who are as vast as the sky.”\textsuperscript{19} Not only is she a “sacrifice” in this passage, but in accordance with Buddhist ideas, Nun Palmo transformed leprosy, a condition most people view as a detrimental and impure state, into an opportunity to practice the Dharma, to express her full commitment to the Buddhist teachings, and to teach others. Therefore, her illness had a purpose. According to his biographer, the 11th-century Tibetan practitioner Milarepa also valued illness in this way, “For a hermit, sickness is usually an exhortation to spiritual practice. Without performing any ritual, he must transform all experiences of adverse conditions into sublime attainment and must be able to face sickness and even death itself.”\textsuperscript{20} According to the teaching of blo sbyong, a system of mental purification in the Tibetan tradition ascribed to Tisha and the Bka’ gdam pa teachers, a bodhisattva needs to cultivate bodhicitta in order to be able to create this transformation (‘gyur ba). Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey states:

Bodhicitta eliminates mental and physical obstacles and its cultivation is thus the best initial practice. Like a chemical that transforms all metal into gold, it turns the impurities of the human body into the three Bodies of the Buddha. It is because people have not developed Bodhicitta that they still have an impure form. The rate of this development depends on one’s pure effort.\textsuperscript{21}

This quotation directs attention to the tantric tradition’s idea of “turning poison into medicine,” poison in the Buddhist case referring to delusion and attachment.

Understanding the Nun Palmo story in terms of gender, Kim Gutschow’s work on nuns in Zangskar, Ladakh, describes the ritual as a means for removing sin and defilements; to attain a more favorable rebirth, especially for women; or even to attain autonomy. According to the tradition in this area, women comprise a lower rebirth.\textsuperscript{22} My own research findings on the fasting ritual in nunneries and monasteries in Nepal and Lhasa in 1998 also caused me to think about the gender implications in the performance of the fasting ritual according to the Nun Palmo system for several reasons: (1) women outnumbered men in this practice; (2) it was usually performed in nunneries or primarily organized by nuns; and (3) it was often called a “woman’s practice,” perhaps because of the female role model.\textsuperscript{23} Because of leprosy in one of the biographical accounts, Nun Palmo is initially rejected by laypeople and her monastic followers, and is even accused of being pregnant, promiscuous, or having lost a child. After her healing experience, she returns to a temple empowered and transformed,

[Nun Palmo] cut off her own head,  
Since she placed it on her monastic staff and danced, 
now the people,  
having realized that she was one who attained spiritual realization, 
all requested a blessing and obtained a realization as well.  
Moreover, externally [she] was Nun Palmo.  
Internally, [she] was the Holy Rdo rje Rnal ’byor ma [Dkin Vajrayogin].\textsuperscript{24}
Here Nun Palmo is vindicated because she appeared in Magadha in her inner form, a Buddha figure, blessed the people in the area, and helping them achieve dngos grub (siddhi). Here she appears as the embodiment of the Buddhist concept of renunciation.

Conclusion

Overall, the sources according to the Nun Palmo tradition point to the religious and historiographic value of the figure of Nun Palmo in Tibetan religious history. Her association with key religious figures and practitioners from diverse cultures, and the continuous proliferation and retelling of her life story and practice of her ritual reveal a remarkable individual who transcended time, place, and gender. The transmission of her biographies, fasting ritual, hymns of praise, and the continued presence of her relics throughout the centuries reveal a woman who was larger than life, inspiring others to practice as she did, healing on many levels.

NOTES


the Tradition of Nun Palmo]; and Dalai Lama VII, Thugs rje chen po zhal bcu geig pa dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs smyung bar gnas pa'i cho ga [The Ritual Practice of Propitiation and Fasting of the Eleven-faced Great Compassionate One According to the Palmo Tradition] (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1988), folios 1-58.


3. In a personal communication in 1998, Dan Martin stated that the Newar tradition in Nepal, Nun Palmo is known as Candrikanta (corresponding to the Tibetan name Zla mdzes?). See Dan Martin, Tibetan Histories, 62. Note also another version of her hagiography, Lama Jampal Dorjye and Nima Rinchen Yolmo, Sbrimati Bbikshuni Kamalako Uposhadha (nyungne) Grantha, 2nd ed. (Darjeeling: Yolmo Prakashan, 1996).


8. Ka thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho, Gangs ljomgs dbus gtsang gnas bsdkor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do (An Account of a Pilgrimage to Central Tibet During the Years 1918 to 1920, being the text of Gangs ljomgs dbus gtsang gnas bsdkor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do) (Tashijong: Tibet Craft Community, 1972).

9. The first is one of two red forms of Avalokiteśvara. The other is Spyan ras gzigs yid bzin nor bu. See Gangs ljomgs dbus gtsang gnas bsdkor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do (An Account of a Pilgrimage to Central Tibet During the Years 1918 to 1920, being the text of Gangs ljomgs dbus gtsang gnas bsdkor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do) (Tashijong: Tibet Craft Community, 1972), pp. 407, 409. I thank Hanna Havnevik for this reference.


11. Dge slong ma Dpal mo, Rje btsun thugs rje chen po, Toh. no. 2740, fol. 127b.1-2, 254: zla ba'i 'od ltar rgyal ba'i yum/ gzugs kyi lha mo yid 'ong sku/ yig drug ma la phyag 'tsbal lo/...rang bzin mi dmigs stong pa'i ngang/ bud med gzugs kyi 'gro ba 'dul.
12. Despite the action tantra label of these texts (kriya tantra), Nun Palmo becomes a buddha figure and achieves the supreme attainment (mchog gi dngos grub). The ritual texts prescribe both self and front generation; the latter deals with full identification with a Buddha figure.

13. Dge slong ma dpal mo, 1.5: ‘gro ba bud med kyi lu su skrul nas sms can gyi don la.

14. Note also that Khasarpana is a form of Avalokiteśvara who is known for curing smallpox. Jo gdan, Smyung gnas, 2b.2:// kha sar pa nir cho ‘phrul chen po bs tan//


17. In the modern text on page 14.8, the etymology of the name of the temple Ling kha ra shir gtsug sbrum bu where Nun Palmo must go to see the image of Avalokiteśvara is unclear. The possible meaning of some of these terms is revealing for this study on illness and the role of Avalokiteśvara as healer. Sbrum bu is associated with the term ‘brum pa meaning “pock or postule” or “small pox” (as in the Tibetan medical texts, Rgyud bzhi). See Tsewang J. Tsarong, Fundamentals of Tibetan Medicine (Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical Center, 1981), p. 104.

18. Dge slong ma dpal mo, 17.4-6, 18.1-2: // smyung gnas gnang nas / nyi ma gcig za ma / nyi ma gcig ngag byed nas / thugs dam la ‘phags pa’i bstod pa snying stobs brtson ’grus drag po’i sgo nas ’di ltar gsungs pa / .../ ’phags pa’i thugs rjes dge slong ma dpal mo phung po ’ja’ las grub nas tbe ’di la mkha’ spyod du gshugs pa yin no//

19. Dge slong ma dpal mo, 7.12-13: nam mkha’ dang mnyam pa’i sms can gyi don la na ba yin gsungs/


24. Jo gdan, Smyung gnos, 7a.5–7b.1: khong rang gi dbu bshad nas mkhar bsil la bkal te gar mdzad pas/ bzhod mi rnam kyi gnos grub pa’o thob par sbrs nas thams cad kyis byin ralbs zhus shing dngos grub kyang thob bo// de yang phyi ltar dge slong ma dpal mo// nad ltar vje bsun rdo rje vna’l byor ma’o/ Rjes bsun rdo rje Rnal’ byor ma’s common manifestation is as a meditational deity (yi dam) who appears in the classical dancing (bro brdung) mkha’ ‘gro ma form with her staff (tse sum). This figure is important in all the tantric lineages of Tibet and is said to have directly transmitted her teachings through the siddhas Naropa, Maitripa, and Indrabhita. She is particularly connected with Anuttarayoga Tantra (vna’l byor bla na med kyi rgyud), the highest of the four orders of tantra. These details are significant because of Nun Palmo’s association in the hagiographies with an Indrabhita and a possible connection with a Kashmiri woman by the name of Dpal mo who wrote Anuttarayoga Tantras.
Buddhist Education
Offering Dharma to children within the public school system in the United States is of special urgency. Many children are yearning for self-acceptance, peer approval, and general happiness. However, many children are taking refuge in violence, drugs, sexual promiscuity, materialism, television and computer games. These false refuges do not bring true happiness, but cause even more suffering. Religion and spirituality, which are the usual sources of ethical guidance, are by law systematically avoided in public education. As a result, our children are not provided with instruction to deal with their struggles for self-worth and happiness. Our children need to develop skills to respond to the difficulties they face in their lives. They need wisdom and compassion in order to avert suffering and to create the causes for true happiness.

Many educators in the public school system recognize and consider their students’ ethical development to be of critical importance; unfortunately, public educators are usually forced to put these considerations aside due to the overwhelming government imposed academic standards they are required to teach. These standards dictate the subject matter in the classroom. While they stress high academic achievement, they ignore ethical objectives as well as the individual needs of each child. Furthermore, educators are under pressure to get their students to perform well on the standardized tests. School test performance is publicized and if students perform below government target scores, schools are labeled “improvement schools.” In addition, principals can be reassigned to another school. Families are provided with the option to leave the “improvement school,” although the local school district must pay for the costly transportation. As a result of inadequate test scores, educators at all levels are scrutinized on the basis of the test results.

Many educators help children that come to school after a night spent without food or shelter or a night of neglect or violence. Many educators help a child that comes to school not ready to learn at the target expectation because of a learning disability, a fragile self image, a low command of the English language, inadequate support at home, or because of simple apathy. These considerations are not made when evaluating an administrator or a teacher.

There are outstanding educational programs that focus on ethics and morality that teachers and principals can choose to incorporate into their curriculum, although educators find it difficult to “fit it in” with the government’s priorities. As it is with our dharma practice, if a teacher cannot integrate a consistent ethics program daily, a successful practice of compassion and wisdom cannot result. Teaching moral principles to children within the public school system requires that it be integrated with the educational standards of our local, state, and federal governments. This allows for a strong daily practice of morality.

I have developed a standards-based elementary curriculum infused with a non-secular presentation of Lord Buddha’s teachings supported by the teachings of our nation’s indigenous people. The curriculum is founded in the teachings of my precious root lama, Geshe Michael Roach, a student of Sermey Khensur Geshe Lobsang Tharchin Rinpoche of the Gelugpa tradition. To emphasize Buddhist principles, complimentary ethics within the indigenous traditions are used as a resource. This is done through the guidance of my relations with Leonard and Marie Dennis of the Navajo tradition. I have adopted them as my parents, and
they generously share the wisdom and traditions of their lineage with me. In addition, the curriculum has emerged through my experiences as a social worker and a teacher in elementary schools within the public school system for the past nine years.

An important consideration for teaching this integrated curriculum is the different socio-economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the children. To honor this diversity, I have involved principals, colleagues, and parent volunteers with the process of creating the curriculum as well as in the presentation of it (I am also very sensitive to proselytizing due to my upbringing as a Filipino Jew in the southern state of Georgia!). The curriculum entails classroom management, daily practices, short and long term projects, field trips and celebrations driven by Buddhist principles. Our academic standards are used as a roadmap, where the integration of ethical and academic standards meets the needs of the government, school administrators, teachers, and the families and children.

With the possibility of having a classroom of 30 or more children who are exposed to many different parenting styles, classroom management is an important consideration. The freedom vows and the six perfections, which we call virtues, provide much guidance. Each virtue is a theme in which students diligently study what the virtue “looks like, sounds like, and feels like.” These virtues become a common language in our classroom. Therefore, they are a powerful tool to communicate expectations in a clear, positive, and safe way. Students then assess their own actions, speech, and thoughts according to the one or two virtues they are working on for that day.

Next, students track and write about their progress and challenges with respect to their goals in a notebook called the “Good Book.” They write about the consequences of their decisions. They also write an antidote they will work on to counteract a negative choice. Students are encouraged to seek virtuous opportunities throughout the day to dedicate, and they have specific times during the day to check in on their acts of kindness and areas of improvement. This daily activity serves as a study of the laws of cause and effect and taking responsibility for positive changes in life. Their writings are utilized to support academic standards of editing, structural organization, spelling, and vocabulary building in writing. To support helpful decision-making, students have daily opportunities to earn points to put in our “Good Deeds Backpack” which is accomplished when a classmate is caught in a virtuous act. The goal is to keep our karma backpack full of kind acts. We celebrate our good efforts with “Joyous Effort” celebrations as a reminder to practice being happy when we choose kindness. We offer others and ourselves delicious foods and fun activities to nurture our innate ability to be kind and compassionate. The celebration allows students to have opportunities to share stories of kindness and wisdom, and we dedicate our goodness to our future efforts at virtue.

The curriculum contains short-term and long-term activities and projects that support an ethical way of being. In one ongoing activity involving the teachings of Buddhism and indigenous shamanistic ways, students engage in preliminary practices of meditative concentration as they develop a relationship with a special animal that they create from their heart and mind. Research on an animal to which they feel a connection to is used to cement a relationship with one’s special animal friend. Similar to our meditation practice, the “Special Friends” activity gives children a step by step method to practice quietude, to seek inner wisdom, and to strengthen concentration and compassion – albeit in a playful, child-centered manor. In addition, students create stories and compositions about their special friends to improve creative writing skills. The mechanics of punctuation, sentence and paragraph structure, organizational writing techniques, as well as the use of research and technology are some of the lesson’s focal points. For many students I work with, this is one of their first experiences of enjoying writing. The students want to share their friend with others, which results in a passionate, focused writing process. During our “Writers’ Workshop” sessions, the room feels crisp and active, and because their special friend comes from their heart, they are the experts. This results in the students taking responsibility and pride in their work.

The “Special Friends” activity requires that the students use their visualization and imagination skills, as many professional athletes are instructed to do before a big game or meet. They are encouraged to get
comfortable and close their eyes to promote an inward process. First, students create with their imagination (heart-mind) a consistent, special place of refuge, located where their heart is. The children are asked to use their sight from inside and to follow these instructions: “go to your heart where you find your special place – your source of goodness and wisdom.” They visualize a beautiful fragrant rose to symbolize their compassion and a flawless shiny diamond to symbolize their perfect wisdom. Some of my students have shared that they find safety among colorful rainbow waterfalls, trees bent with ripe fruits and rich chocolate bars, and sandy beaches along emerald forests.

Students are then guided to visualize an offering to give to their special friend as an act of gratitude, for their friend helps them make wise choices so others may benefit. One student that has a mouse as a special friend offers fine cheeses and mazes to run through, a student that has a dolphin brings balls and toys for offerings, and another student that has a hummingbird as a special friend shares a fancy straw to sip nectar from a crystal clear glass.

Next, students ask their special friend to come to them as they visualize their friend accepting the gift - always with a happy heart. Students, so to prevent a heavy heart, now tell their special friend something that they regret that they did, said, or thought within the last 24-48 hours something that was not kind. Students tell their special friend what they could and will do next time, so that they cause no more harm. Then students share something they did that was kind within the last day or two, perhaps sharing a pencil with a classmate, letting someone else go first at tetherball, or simply did not gossip. This is usually followed by a high five or a hug from their special friend to celebrate their good decisions. Students then visualize “free time” with their friend which usually involves playful or restful activities.

The next step is for students to discuss an ethical topic with their special friend. Sometimes students use this time with their special friend to work out anger or sadness they are feeling due to an issue with a friend or a family member. Others might need to relax or share the details of a baseball game they won. Finally, students are guided to say “see you soon,” to ask their special friend to always stay in their heart, and visualize their special friend melting inside their heart. They then end the activity by dedicating their good deeds and to always have virtuous role models in their life.

As a teacher, the “special friends” activity has been an effective tool to gain an understanding of a student’s feelings and experiences. I do not offer this activity until I have connected with my class, and a trusting relationship has been established.

Another component of the curriculum involves integrating social science standards with Buddhist and Native American teachings. Children study people and events in history, according to the grade-level standards, by analyzing different perspectives. Students use their knowledge of ethical behavior to guide their study and to be exposed to the possibilities that things might not be how they appear at first. Current event activities are matched with the principles of Tong Len. Students read selected articles from the newspaper and explore the perspectives presented in the article. Children then focus on and examine whether suffering is experienced by anyone or whether someone is helping others out of suffering. We then find good deeds in our “Good Book” and dedicate them to those we read about. Many times the students send acts of kindness to someone causing harm to another due to their understanding that harmful behavior has consequences. To reinforce the mentality of helping others, students select and research peaceful role-models from different religious and cultural backgrounds (Student choices have been Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Anne Frank, Thich Nhat Hanh, and George Bush, to name a few) and create plays and short presentations. Activities include creating plays and making short presentations.

Students also write and interview peaceful leaders. My students wrote to their teacher’s teacher, Geshe Michael Roach, as he was finishing his three year, three month, three day retreat as well as created a play based on his book, The Garden. My students also interviewed and met my Native American elders, Leonard and Marie Dennis who visited the students quarterly and shared their native tradition and philosophy. My native elders expressed how their ancestors taught them to be in service to others and to respect all forms
of life. This personal experience proved to be very effective. Students related to and appreciated the simple wisdom of the native traditions and were able to discover independently the human experience of struggle and success in this pursuit for goodness. Students also made connections with enthusiasm, the universal message of living in a peaceful way from leaders around the world.

My intention with this curriculum is to support children and educators in providing opportunities that promote an ethical way of life. Presently, I am going into other classrooms with this curriculum. I believe a sustainable program would consist of collaborative efforts with other teachers and administrators where the classroom teacher teaches the curriculum. Teachers would go through a training where they would explore the different philosophical and practical aspects of the curriculum. Teachers would be provided with lesson plans and instructions according to the grade-level they teach. Such a program benefits the educators in that they can teach in compliance with the academic standards of their state while experiencing the results of a classroom focused on kindness. Most importantly, by gaining merit and wisdom, children have the opportunity to plant seeds in pursuit of ultimate happiness for all sentient beings.
Buddhist Education for Children

Daewon Kwon

There are certain time periods that are optimal for acquiring various developmental skills. Most developmental skills are best learned during childhood. This period is sometimes called the “critical period,” because developmental skills that are not mastered within this time frame can never be fully supplemented at any other time. By providing Buddhist experience to a child in this critical period, Buddhist Children’s Education (BCE) aims to help him or her cultivate the virtues of a mature Buddhist believer, adjust to the Buddhist way of life, and ultimately become an ideal Buddhist figure who has attained spiritual enlightenment.

Today’s education system fails to provide the right direction in this world of duality where understanding does not translate into practice in everyday life. This article proposes BCE as a spiritual and educational paradigm that will integrate understanding and life through an examination of the Buddhist views on children’s education.

The Teaching Methods of BCE

BCE must take a friendly approach that is on a level with the child’s developmental stage. Shaping children’s religious nature, or shaping their sense of values, is a goal that must be planned and implemented in harmony with their developmental stage. Due to the fact that children by nature find it difficult to memorize Buddhist ideas and theories, they must be approached in a friendly manner. Forcing abstract concepts and terms on children may lead them to misunderstand what religion is and disrupt their religious development at a stage when they are not fully mature. Moreover, exposing children to religious ideas too early or too often poses the risk of diminishing their ability to think critically and may alienate them from religion. It may even eventually interfere with the development of higher order thinking on religious issues.

BCE must be woven seamlessly into the fabric of day-to-day education instead of aiming for extraordinary programs, because children learn the most through their audio-visual senses as they go about their daily lives, rather than through philosophical speculation or inculcation and exposition of various theories. Designing such integrated, continuous programs for BCE is ultimately in accordance with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent arising.

BCE must be primarily based on the Buddhist doctrine. While the curriculum of BCE must be on a par with children’s developmental stages and easy to follow, it must above all utilize the Buddhist texts as key study materials, because a biased interpretation or the personal views of the teacher may limit the children’s perspectives. BCE places great emphasis on establishing a right sense of religion in children through teaching them Buddhist ideas and practice guidelines, while at the same time encouraging their potential and social nature so they can attain an independent and creative perspective of the world. Among the numerous Buddhist theories, those best suited for children’s education are the Noble Eightfold Path,
the Four Principles of Social Behavior, the Six Perfections, and the Threefold Training. The following chart is an example of a detailed practice program based on Right Action, one step of The Noble Eightfold Path.

### Right Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Social Activities</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Speech</th>
<th>Inquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Soen meditation</td>
<td>Practicing the five precepts for children</td>
<td>Creative expression of feelings through concentration and meditation</td>
<td>Right speaking posture</td>
<td>Display of interest in natural phenomena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right walking posture</td>
<td>Controlling emotions and desires</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right dietary habits</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

BCE must arouse the interest of a child and connect learning with play. First and foremost, all elements of BCE must be related to the daily lives of children and help them learn new concepts through voluntary activities and cooperation with others. For instance, the basic Buddhist idea of the bodhisattva mind – compassion and the belief that by benefitting others one benefits oneself – helps children understand that the individual is a part of society, so they become genuinely interested and integrate what they learn.

The most important element in helping children accept Buddhist ideas is the environment factor. Religious values are molded in children through fun activities in a familiar, rather than artificial, setting. In line with the current trend in education that increasingly stresses the idea of “Play and Learn, Learn and Play,” in Buddhism, children’s play carries symbolic meaning; it is a part of the process of becoming an ideal Buddhist figure and enlightens adults to the wisdom of life. In the end, it is through play that children mature into agreeable, creative individuals with good character.

BCE programs must be aligned with the general curriculum, coordinating religion and learning so that the two complement each other. In a survey of the teachers engaged in the field of BCE, most responded that they would like to see a BCE program that is compatible with the general curriculum and does not differentiate Buddhism from education. As this survey shows, in detailed BCE programs for nurturing the Buddhist nature in children, religion and learning must complement each other and be logically valid. Such programs must keep pace with the existing curriculum, covering areas such as health, social activities, expression, speech, and inquiry.

### BCE Programs

The teaching methods of BCE are based on Buddhist doctrine. At the heart of Buddhist doctrine is the belief that everyone can become a bodhisattva because each possesses Buddhist nature. In other words, there is no such thing as absolute teaching. What is important is inducing this nature to manifest as good character.
Below is a brief overview of how to apply the Noble Eightfold Path, the Six Perfections, and the five precepts for children in BCE, all of which are the Buddhist theories appropriate for educating children. One appropriate teaching method is the Respect for Life Program. Buddhism not only regards human life as precious, but also the lives of all living creatures. It therefore promotes the coexistence of humankind and all life in the universe. In this context, Not-Two-But One (Bool-eel-bool-ee), the Buddhist belief that human beings and nature are essentially one and the same, has very important educational value. Coming into contact with nature, breathing and interacting with it, are what Buddhism deems the ideal development process. Life cannot be separated from all other concepts of the surrounding environment. The Respect for Life Program is an invaluable opportunity for children to learn first-hand about life.

### The Noble Eightfold Path

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtues</th>
<th>Specific Practice Guidelines</th>
<th>Developmental Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Right Understanding</td>
<td>Right Understanding is the principal of the Noble Eightfold Path because it refers to the wisdom of understanding life and the world as they really are, through which one can grasp the nature of things.</td>
<td>Social development, Physical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Thought</td>
<td>Right thoughts and volition before actually carrying them out in deeds. Right Thought refers to the mental process that enables the right speculation and interpretation of the Buddhist doctrine.</td>
<td>Cognitive development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right Speech</td>
<td>Right Speech means helping others or cooperating with them through words of truth or self-love. It also means abstaining from false speech but speaking only words of truth. Buddhism classifies Right Speech into four categories: words of truth, words of compassion, words of praise, and words of support.</td>
<td>Social development, Physical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right livelihood</td>
<td>Right livelihood means one should earn one’s living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally. When teaching children, this concept could be simplified to mean that they should never kill living beings, steal, tease the weak, lie, deceive others, fight with their friends, become angry and say curse words.</td>
<td>Social development, Physical development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right effort</td>
<td>Right effort literally means making effort in a righteous way. One can explain this concept to children by telling them to reflect on their conduct and repent, make best effort with calm and clean mind, stop bad behaviors, help the poor, endure difficulties, and keep their promises.</td>
<td>Cognitive development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right mindfulness</td>
<td>Right effort literally means making effort in a righteous way. One can explain this concept to children by telling them to reflect on their conduct and repent, make best effort with calm and clean mind, stop bad behaviors, help the poor, endure difficulties, and keep their promises.</td>
<td>Emotional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right concentration</td>
<td>Right concentration is a way of life in which Buddhists calm their mind, control their breath and meditate. It means building a perfect character by calming one's distracted body and soul through total concentration of will and mind.</td>
<td>Emotional development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Integrated Curriculum Based on Buddhism in Kindergartens

The Integrated Curriculum Based on Buddhism is a specific educational tool intended to help children with bad behaviors to realize and manifest their Buddha nature. The concept of “integration” in education comes from the perspective that sees all human beings as an integrated whole, and is sometimes used in describing the relationship between human and environment. John Dewey stated that experience is the undivided continuous interaction between organisms and their environment, while Friedrich Frobel integrated the concept of integration into children’s education by asserting the unity of God, nature, and humanity. This curriculum aims to integrate a secular education program and a religion education program to help children explore the intellectual world as well as to learn about values in life. Simply put, it is the integration of common knowledge and the Buddhist outlook on the world.

### Education through Buddhist Events and Field Trips

Educational activities at Buddhist events help children become more familiar with Buddha’s teachings and enrich their experience as Buddhists. By actively participating in various activities rather than being overwhelmed by complex messages conveyed at such events, children can clearly remember their experience, and fully digest what they learned to apply to their everyday life.

There are four major Buddhist festive days: the Buddha’s birthday, the Renunciation Day, the Buddha’s Supreme Enlightenment Day, and the Buddha’s Parinirvana Day. These events can be opportunities to educate children about Buddhism.
Buddhist Festive Days

| The Buddha's Birthday | Theme: Celebrating the Birth of the Buddha  
Buddhist concepts: karmic affinity, lotus  
Related events: lotus flower festival, circumambulating the temple (tapdori), bathing of the Buddha, the six offerings (tea, incense, candles, flowers, fruit, and food) |
| The Renunciation Day | Theme: Reaffirming Buddhist Identity  
Buddhist concepts: ways of practice for Buddhist monks/nuns, five precepts for children, altar arrangement |
| The Buddha's Supreme Enlightenment Day | Theme: Being a Buddha  
Buddhist concepts: the meaning of enlightenment, the bodhisattva ideal, Zen meditation, the six perfections |
| The Buddha's Parinirvana Day | Theme: Understanding Death as a Transition  
Buddhist concepts: nirvana, cycle of rebirth |

Children can acquire valuable experience through direct and concrete encounters with elements of Buddhist practice on field trips. Field trip experiences are special in that they highlight the Buddha nature in children in a setting outside of class. Children can build the foundation for abstract religious thinking and activities by visiting Buddhist temples to see Buddha statues, temples, bells, and wind chimes, and by meeting Buddhist monks and nuns.

Teaching Methods: Instructional Media and the Educational Environment

Instructional media encompass all elements of an educational environment, including all kinds of teaching/learning materials, teaching techniques, and the learning atmosphere. The concept of “instructional media” in BCE is an effective tool to inscribe core Buddhist ideas in children’s hearts through close consideration of children’s way of thinking. It emphasizes efficient harmonization of all elements of Buddhist education. In educational activities, various media are used to promote learning. Such media are generally called educational materials. They are also referred to as teaching materials, educational instruments or instructional media. By utilizing effective instructional media in BCE, one can explain Buddha’s teachings in the most suitable way for children. In other words, instructional media help children understand complex sūtras and profound Buddhist concepts.

Education through Environment

Creating an optimum environment is vital to efficiently carrying out education programs. Likewise, a Buddhist environment is an essential element of BCE. If the educational institutions are located within or close to Buddhist temples, children can have easy access to a Buddhist environment. If not, however, one should create a simulated Buddhist environment. Easy access to a Buddhist environment is crucial considering that the foundation of religious faith is formed during childhood, and religious impression and influences during that period carry into adulthood. One can provide an artificial Buddhist environment by placing Buddha statues or baby Buddha statues in each class at the entrance and in the hallways, and hanging photographs of Buddha statues on the wall. Another way is to decorate the bulletin boards and
windows with statues of the Kuanyin Bodhisattva, lotus flowers, baby elephants, and the Dharma wheel. Making lotus lanterns with children and decorating the class doors and ceiling can be another alternative.

Conclusion

Effective BCE requires the educators to have faith and respect for Buddhism. The educators should never consider teaching as a habitual activity. Rather than being arrogant about what they know, they must keep on searching for ways to maximize the benefits of Buddhist education for children by continuously delving into all facets of education with willingness to learn and work harder. Along with the Integrated Curriculum Based on Buddhism, the Respect for Life Program can ensure a well-rounded education for cultivating an upright personality. These programs will assist children in developing respect for living beings so that they can realize the meaning of human life and develop human values. Education through instructional media and a conducive educational environment must be geared toward broadening children’s creative thinking in addition to transferring knowledge.

Above all, the BCE educators must be able to predict and understand the tide of changes. The programs and instructional media mentioned above should be rooted in the Multiple Intelligence (MI) Theory which recognizes different capabilities and individuality, and promotes acceptance and multiculturalism, rather than uniformity. In this new information era, educators can also take advantage of new information and communications technologies to foster BCE and Buddhist propagation work. Whatever the goals of education are, the methods that “plan, do, and see” will be a truly effective means of education that can make further progress.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Eun-joo Kwon (Daewon), The Integrated Curriculum Based on Buddhism at Buddhist Kindergartens (Seoul: Yangseowon, 2001); Eun-joo Kwon (Daewon), Child Studies on Buddhism (Seoul: Yangseowon, 1996); and Eun-joo Kwon (Daewon), The Research on the Educational Materials and Instruction (Seoul: Yangseowon, 2001).


3. Available resources include Eun-joo Kwon (Daewon) et al, Buddhist Stories for Children on Computer CD.
Education of the Vietnamese Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in Modern Times

Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet

Although Buddhism came to Vietnam very early in the first century CE, the first bhikṣuṇī ordination was held almost four hundred years later. Historically, from the beginning up to the first half of the twentieth century, images of Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs appear very rarely. In 1957, an association of bhikṣuṇīs was founded but did not last long. When the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha Council was established in 1981, the nuns joined this general council and came under the same administration as the monks, including guidelines for education.

Vietnamese nuns undergo the same system of training as monks do. It takes ten years to complete three courses, consisting of: (1) a two-year primary Buddhist course that familiarizes monks and nuns with Buddhist doctrine, (2) a four-year basic Buddhist course that provides a foundation for the monastic education of monks and nuns, not only in general knowledge but also in mental cultivation, and (3) a four-year program in advanced Buddhist studies in a Buddhist institute, which provides students with an education in the histories, literatures, and philosophies of the three main Buddhist traditions (Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Mahāyāna). In this program, the four Āgamas, the four Nikāyas, Prātimokṣa, and many Mahāyāna sūtras, along with the main Abhidharmas and śastras of each tradition, are taught in a series of classes. In addition, students practice meditation under the guidance of the rector.

In general, Buddhist education for monks and nuns in modern Vietnam has accomplished its initial objectives. However, some theoretical and practical challenges still lie ahead. Step by step, leaders in the field of Buddhist education are doing their best to resolve these complex issues, promising to implement a complete modern system of education. Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs now enjoy the same conditions that bhikṣus do in the field of education. After graduating, they also have many opportunities in the Saṅgha to constantly enhance their knowledge and get more and more experience through dialogue with their sisters in other Buddhist countries. They have broadened their activities in society, which has raised their profiles both in the Vietnamese Buddhist community and in the wider Buddhist world.

The history of Buddhism in Vietnam can be traced to the first century CE.1 Very soon after its introduction, Buddhist thought and culture became integrated into the lives of the Vietnamese people. About four hundred years later, around the same time as in China, the first Vietnamese women received ordination and became bhikṣuṇīs, full-fledged members of the Buddhist Saṅgha.2 Due to a thousand years of continual warfare between China and Vietnam, from the first to the tenth centuries, the bhikṣuṇīs nearly disappeared from the historical records. Up to the time of Vietnam’s independence, Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs were rarely visible even on their own soil.

Nevertheless, with the help of the Bhikṣu Saṅgha, Vietnamese bhukunis have worked hard to overcome many inner and outer difficulties up to the present time. Finally, in 1957, the bhikṣuṇi order was officially
established alongside the bhikṣu order. From that day, the bhikṣuṇī became more and more active. Some nuns became spiritual teachers for the laity. They engaged in social welfare activities as teachers, nurses, and social workers. Nunneries were founded and organized to train nuns both in spiritual matters, to further their mental cultivation, and in practical matters, to prepare them to alleviate people’s sufferings during the Vietnam War. They worked under the leadership of the Bhikṣuṇī Council, which was headed by the late Ven. Dieu Tanh.

By the end of April 1975, the reunion of the south and north of the nation turned a new page in the history of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha, particularly for Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs. To unify all Buddhist traditions and organizations, the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha was founded in 1981. On one hand, this organization cooperated with the government to rebuild the country. On the other hand, it strengthened the organizational structure of the Saṅgha and established a system of monastic education for its members. In 1984, monastic schools were opened. In a national movement, these schools welcomed the many monks and nuns who were eager to learn and practice the Buddhist teachings. From that time forward, Vietnamese nuns have had full access to the education system and attended the same schools as monks do, receiving teachings and guidance from the same teachers.

At present, the system of monastic education is a ten-year program, divided into three courses: (1) primary Buddhist education, (2) basic Buddhist education, and (3) advanced Buddhist studies at a Buddhist institute. There is an age limit for studying at these schools: students must be at least 14 years for the primary Buddhist education programs, 18 years old for the basic education programs, and 25 years old for advanced Buddhist studies programs at a Buddhist institute. The primary Buddhist education programs provide young monks and nuns with a two-year introduction to basic Buddhist teachings. They learn about the life of the Buddha, the discipline of śramaṇas and śramaṇerikās, Buddhist monastic terms, classical Chinese, basic English, literary composition, and basic Buddhist doctrines such as compassion, benevolence, causation, dependent arising, karma, and rebirth.

Young monks and nuns who wish to join the basic Buddhist education programs must have completed junior high school at a government school. In the four-year basic Buddhist program, students study the Dhammapada, Buddhhabhasita Dasabhadra Karmamarga Sūtra, Sūtra of the Buddha’s Bequeathed Teaching, Sūtra on the Eight Realizations of the Great Being, Sūtra of Forty-two Sections, Sūtra of One-hundred Parables, the discipline of śramaṇas and śramaṇerikās, the discipline of the bodhisattva, the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, the history of Indian Buddhism, and so on. In addition to these subjects, they continue their study of classical Chinese, English, literary composition, civics, and legal procedures. The main purpose of this program is to equip young monks and nuns with a general knowledge of Buddhism, to foster a proper view toward practice, and to strengthen faith in the religious life. At present, there are 30 schools that offer basic Buddhist education located all over the country. These schools have trained over 12,000 nuns, out of total of 30,000 nuns in the country (about 40 percent).

After completing basic Buddhist schooling, there are two choices: the more capable students join an Advanced Buddhist Studies Program and the less capable enroll in a Higher Buddhist School. The Higher Buddhist course lasts for three years and consists of mostly the same sūtras that are studied in the basic Buddhist school. Students do not learn any non-canonical subjects except for ancient Chinese language. After finishing this course, they can become a Dharma teacher to guide the laypeople, become an official in the Buddhist office, or join the Advanced Buddhist Studies Program. There are five such schools nationwide and about 1000 monks and nuns under training.

In order to join the Advanced Buddhist Studies Program at a Buddhist institute, monks and nuns must graduate from a government senior high school (12th class) and must pass a difficult competitive examination which consists of four papers: basic Buddhist tenets, English, ancient Chinese language, and Vietnamese literary writing. Being a student in the Advanced Buddhist Studies Program at a Buddhist Institute is a dream come true for young monks and nuns who are avid to study Buddhist doctrine. This
course requires four years to complete and the students must work very hard to follow the course. They study both canonical subjects and non-canonical subjects. The canonical subjects include three main Buddhist traditions, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Mahāyāna. Students study the four Āgamas and the Abhidharmakosa of the Sarvāstivāda school. Instead of the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, they learn the Dharmagupta Vinaya, because the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition follows this Vinaya school. From the Theravāda tradition, the first four Nikāyas and some parts of Khuddaka Nikāya are taught in the first three years and the Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghosa in the last year.

From the beginning, Vietnamese Buddhism has been predominately Mahāyāna, so in this course the Mahāyāna sūtras are explained extensively, including the Lankavatāra Sūtra, Saddharmapundarika Sūtra, Avatamsaka Sūtra, Vimalakirti-nidesa Sūtra, Astasahasrika Prajñaparamita Sūtra, Vajracchedika Prajñaparamita, Surangamasadhiraja Sūtra, Mahāyāna Mahaparinirvāna Sūtra, Smaller and Larger Sukhavativyūha Sūtras, Úrimaladevisidhanada Sūtra, Lalitavistara Sūtra, Suvannaprabhasasuttamaraṇa Sūtra, and so forth. As for the commentaries (śāstra), the Madhyamika Śāstra, Hetuvidya Śāstra, and the Vijñaptimātrasiddhi Śāstra are taught.

Along with canonical subjects, students also study many non-canonical subjects, such as the history of Vietnamese Buddhism, the history of Buddhism in the world, the history of Vietnam, Western philosophy, Asian philosophy, Marxist philosophy, civil and legal procedures, Vietnamese literature, Vietnamese literary composition, classical Chinese, modern Chinese (Mandarin), basic Pāli, basic Sanskrit, and advanced English.

Besides these subjects, monks and nuns have to study some basic social science subjects, such as management, aesthetics, psychology, sociology, and environmental science. As a special course, they study meditation practice under the guidance of the rector. There are now three Buddhist institutes, one each in the southern, central, and northern regions of Vietnam. About 700 monks and nuns attend classes in these institutes. As in other Buddhist schools, 40 percent of these are Buddhist nuns.

As in other Buddhist countries, monks dominate the Saṅgha in Vietnam, controlling all activities. Even in the field of education, all Dharma teachers are male, except the teacher of the Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa, who is a senior nun. Nowadays, however, the status of women has been enhanced by the women's movement in Vietnam. As in other Buddhist countries, some of Vietnamese nuns have positions as Dharma teachers in primary Buddhist schools and basic Buddhist schools, where they teach both monks and nuns. Nuns who have completed the Advanced Buddhist Studies Program can go abroad for further studies if they get sponsors. Otherwise, they can join translation committees or engage in social work. In recent years, nuns have had opportunities to serve as members of Buddhist representative committees in some provinces and even in the office of the Management Council of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha, though they have little power.

Objectively speaking, the present system of Buddhist education insists on quantity rather than quality, placing too much emphasis on general Buddhist knowledge over depth. Because students learn two ancient languages and two modern foreign languages at the same time, they have less time to reflect on Buddhist doctrine and what they have studied in class. Another issue is pedagogical method. Most Dharma teachers were trained in monasteries without modern pedagogical methodologies. Taught without a systematic pedagogy, students sometimes become confused.

Subjectively speaking, the basic Buddhist schools in the countryside cannot strictly follow the program promulgated by the Department of Education of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha because of a shortage of teachers who are capable to teach the required subjects. This leads to a disparity between comprehension and perception of Buddhist doctrines as well as limited knowledge. As a result, the number of students from the countryside who pass the competitive examination to enroll in the Advanced Buddhist Studies Programs in Buddhist institutes is far fewer than the number of students from the cities.
Another matter to be mentioned is libraries, a system that seems to have been neglected. Students in both the basic Buddhist schools nor the Advanced Buddhist Studies Institutes are frustrated by the lack of sufficient library materials, and are able to learn only what the teacher explains in class. While students try to purchase books from their own pocket, nuns usually get fewer donations than monks, so they have to borrow books from monks. Still, the nuns try their best to study and sometimes their examination results are even higher than the monks’.

The most important focus of Buddhist studies should be the practice and development of morality and spirituality. Education means transmitting knowledge, experience, and professional skills from one person to another. It means guiding others’ emotional development and attitudes toward life, helping students develop good tendencies, so that they can adapt to various circumstances. On a higher level, Buddhist education leads people to reduce the sufferings of samsara to attain happiness, the final goal. Therefore, Buddhist education needs to emphasize practice more than theory. In the present system, however, it is the other way around.

In the fifth assembly of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha held in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, on December 4 and 5, 2002, the topic of Buddhist education was discussed enthusiastically. Buddhist leaders presented their ideas and opinions to find out the ways to overcome obstacles and difficulties in the present Buddhist education system. However, both the objective and subjective hindrances that lie ahead seem to challenge the progress of the Vietnamese Buddhist Saṅgha in particular and the Vietnamese people in general.

In the assembly, Ven. Thich Gia Quang, the representative of the Department of Buddhist Education, emphasized that: “Buddhist education in modern times must be based on moral discipline, meditation, and wisdom. Its main subjects are the young monks and nuns, their behavior, knowledge, and minds. It needs to be updated and equipped with modern techniques in order to integrate itself in the development of our nation and the world. It welcomes and appreciates the new and modern Buddhist knowledge, and meanwhile esteems and preserves the old traditions. Its final goal is to train the younger generation in order to introduce monks and nuns with high moral and conduct to society, decreasing suffering and benefitting the people on the way to liberation. Education becomes futile if the educators do not realize their educational subject, target, content, and methods.”

In conclusion, Vietnamese Buddhist education at the present time has achieved the foundation stage. Step by step, it has overcome and is fulfilling the hopes of over thirty thousand young monks and nuns who will become leaders of the Vietnamese Saṅgha in the future. Under the present system of education and training, Vietnamese bhiksuniś not only enjoy the same conditions as bhikṣuś, but they also get many opportunities to work in the Saṅgha after completing their studies. No doubt, they are more fortunate than their sisters in other Buddhist countries. They have enhanced their knowledge continuously, sending over 80 bhiksuniś abroad to study in India, China, Taiwan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, and the United States to get more knowledge and experience. They have broadened their activities and are more visible both in Vietnamese society and in the Buddhist world. Nevertheless, Vietnamese bhiksuniś are not completely satisfied with present conditions. They hope that the Vietnamese Buddhist Sahā will continue its efforts to shine the light and enrich the educational opportunities available to nuns in Vietnam and throughout the world.

NOTES


A Different Dharma?
Teaching Buddhism at Universities in the United States

*Karma Lekshe Tsomo*

In recent years, Buddhism has gained international attention and joined the mainstream in Western popular cultures. What was once exclusively an Asian tradition has become a global phenomenon, exerting an influence in the fields of psychology, film, philosophy, and advertising. What was once viewed as outdated superstition or nihilistic paganism has now become a staple of everyday discourse, at least among college-educated people in the United States, which is about sixty percent of the total population. Thousands of college students are introduced to Buddhism in world religions and Asian philosophy classes and dozens of universities across North America now offer classes in Buddhism, most at an introductory level.

For eight years now, I have been teaching classes on Buddhism at Antioch University, Chaminade University, and now at the University of San Diego, a Catholic university. As I teach these classes, I recognize that teaching at the university level to an audience of Western students is different in several discernible ways from teaching an audience of Asian Buddhists. The history and development of Buddhism in the West has been the topic of a number of recent publications and the assimilation of Buddhism in Western societies is now a growing discipline within the field of religious studies. Here I would like to explore the differences in how Buddhism is understood by university students in the United States and speculate about how Buddhist traditions might be presented effectively to non-Buddhists in the future. The major differences I have noted thus far pertain to philosophy, culture, gender, and technology. I will reflect on these four areas one by one.

Buddhism Through Different Lenses

The first major difference is how Buddhist philosophy is interpreted within a Western frame of reference. My own training in Buddhist studies and practice has been very traditional and received almost entirely during 18 years of study and practice in Asia. Over the years, I kept touch with the introduction of Buddhism to the United States when I returned to work at a job to finance my studies in Asia and as I worked as a volunteer to help found a number of new Buddhist centers on American soil, mostly in Hawai‘i. The differences in approach between Buddhist centers in Asia and the West was very apparent. Certain philosophical assumptions that Asian Buddhists make about the world and human beings’ place are not automatically accepted within an American frame of reference. For example, the notions of karma, rebirth, and the desirability of liberation from *samsāra* are generally taken for granted by those who have been raised as Buddhists or born within Buddhist societies. These notions are not automatically accepted by university students in the United States, however. Basic Buddhist notions about the nature of the world and the meaning of human life must therefore be presented as theories for consideration rather than as gospel.
truth. The problem is that, because Buddhist thought and practice are premised on these assumptions, the whole project of presenting Buddhism gets upended from the very beginning. It is challenging to teach Madhyamika and other advanced philosophical systems when students are unfamiliar with the fundamental concepts that underlie these systems. Topics such as suffering, impermanence, and death – the primary building blocks of the Buddhist worldview – have to be thoroughly dissected from every angle and the critiques of these fundamental teachings handled before students are ready to go on to more advanced topics in Buddhism studies.

The second major difference is how Buddhism is understood from within different cultural frames. The students that I teach belong to a wide range of ethnic and national backgrounds: Samoan, French, Mexican, Filipino, African, Iranian, and Anglo-American, as well as Taiwanese, Korean, Chinese American, Japanese American, and Vietnamese. Students in the latter categories have often grown up with at least a passive acquaintance with Buddhist culture. Even though they may or may not know much about Buddhism, they are generally familiar with the Buddha story, the temple atmosphere, temple protocol (bowing and making offerings, for example), and the monastic lifestyle. Students who have not grown up in Buddhist cultures, although interested in Buddhist philosophy, psychology, and meditation, are unfamiliar with practices such as bowing to the Buddha, showing respect for monks and nuns, making offerings, and so forth. To familiarize students with Buddhist cultures, I require them to visit two temples as part of the class requirements. To prepare them for this experience, I show an introductory video of young monks receiving ordination in Thailand, provide a list of temples in the San Diego area, and provide a sheet on temple protocol. The sheet on temple protocol gives tips on how to dress properly, behave respectfully, and generally helps them feel more comfortable when encountering a new and different cultural environment.

The third major difference in presentation relates to gender issues. For the last fifty years in the United States, girls have received twelve years of compulsory schooling that is roughly the equivalent of what boys receive. Despite the fact that academic expectations for girls are sometimes lower, girls get called on less frequently in classes, and so on, today women account for 52 percent of admissions to law schools and medical schools and are excelling in every academic field. This demonstrates that, when given equal opportunities, women often do better than men in scholarly endeavors. Especially in the university environment, expectations of gender equality are very high, gender inclusive language is supported in research and class assignments, and gender discrimination is quickly recognized and critiqued. For this reason, the issue of women's position within Buddhism becomes a focus of students' attention. Women's issues are a convenient focus for discussing the historical development of the Buddhist Saṅgha (Mahāprajāpatī's founding of the bhikkunī order), the nature of consciousness (the six consciousnesses and the theoretical irrelevance of gender to awakening), and the variant goals of the Buddhist traditions (the goal of individual liberation in Theravāda as distinct from the goal of Buddhahood in Mahāyāna), and the practical problems that women face within Buddhist societies. Gender issues thus become a means of looking at a larger paradigm – the disparity between theory and practice – in general.

The fourth important difference or set of differences in presenting Buddhism in the American university environment relates to technology. American students are all computer literate now and computer labs are available on all university campuses. These students therefore have many advantages over earlier generations of American wishing to learn about Buddhism. With a click of the mouse, they can access the complete Pāli canon and the teachings of the world’s most famous contemporary Buddhist masters in the comfort of their dorm rooms. They can join a chat room and clear up any doubts they have about Buddhist theory and practice with some of the world’s best-known scholars and meditation teachers. They can get information on library resources, the latest publications, and current teachings and retreats available in their area. Increasingly, they can learn about specific Buddhist centers in Korean, Malaysia, Taiwan, or their own neighborhood. They can research the history, philosophy, and practical application of Buddhism, or search out specific topics of interest, such as vegetarianism, women in Buddhism, and ordination. Technology allows us to show videos
on Buddhism to our classes, play CDs of sūtras chanting from the Buddhist traditions, and eventually, if professors can ever catch up to their students, to use tools like PowerPoint and CTWeb to help students learn more about Buddhism more easily. Technology has made Buddhism more easily accessible than ever before in human history and everyday better resources become available.

At the same time, technological advances have created a generation of young people with rather short attention spans. From a young age, children are bombarded by very sophisticated images from television, radio, and film. Because they are fed a very professional diet of media presentations every day, their appetite for excitement and expectation of media quality are very high. Professors who were trained even ten or twenty years ago often struggle even to understand the language of technology, much less how to operate the equipment. Because of the fast pace that these enticing images flood the fields of their senses, it is challenging to make university classroom presentations interesting enough to maintain the students’ concentration. Although I personally prefer to receive teachings from the older generation of Buddhist masters in the classical way, the style of presenting teachings that I experienced during 15 years in India – sitting crosslegged for hours listening to teachings in a foreign language without an opportunity to ask questions – will never appeal to the younger generation of American students. These challenges can also be broadened to apply to presentations of Buddhism in general. Currently there are over 800 websites available that are specifically designed to teach hate: “hate sites,” teaching racial intolerance, torture, and so forth. Buddhists and peace-loving people in general need to become more active and more sophisticated if they wish to capture the attention of the younger generation.

In many ways, the process of transmitting and adapting Buddhism in Western cultures is similar to the process of transmission and adaptation that occurred as Buddhism was introduced to different regions and cultures in earlier centuries. Buddhists in the West today encounter the same problems of language, the same questions about authority, the same concerns about authenticity, and the same challenges of relevance in the contemporary situation. We have begun the arduous process of translating texts from Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan into Western languages, and even with the help of electronic technology, the task is more daunting that even, because of the greater volume of texts to be translated, the differences of language and culture, and the lack of patronage for the translation project. Every translation is an interpretation and so translating Dharma into Western languages means trying to convey Buddhist thought within an alien and rapidly changing philosophical, psychological, and religious context.

The same questions about the process of transmitting and adapting Buddhism in Western cultures arise in regard to practice. The fact that new Buddhist centers are being established all over North America and Europe is evidence that the Buddhist teachings offer something that people in these countries find valuable. The ways in which the teachings are interpreted and practiced are again interpretations of the traditional Buddhist practice forms, with less emphasis on ritual, protocol, symbolism and hierarchy. The emphasis is on the practical aspects of the tradition and what is of immediate usefulness in daily life. I require my students to visit two Buddhist temples or Dharma centers each semester and write about their experiences. When they visit traditional Buddhist temples, they enter a different world where people speak Laotian, Korean, or Vietnamese, chant in these languages before images of the Buddha, pray for their ancestors, and have a wonderful time, even though they have absolutely no idea what is going on. When they go to visit Euroamerican Dharma centers, they find little chanting or incense. Instead, they find a group of individuals from different backgrounds doing sitting meditation, walking meditation, readings from a Dharma book, and then a group discussion about how specific Buddhist teachings and practices have been useful in their lives.

Teaching in a New Grid

Teaching at the university is an opportunity to encourage students to develop critical thinking skills
and examine many important issues. The first set of questions we consider pertains to philosophical issues. Where did the universe begin? Where did human beings come from? What is the purpose of human existence? Where do we go after death? Raising these issues in my classes on Buddhism, World Religions, and Comparative Religious Ethics (Peace and Violence) requires students to question their own assumptions about the world and human beings’ place within it. It requires students to consider alternative perspectives on various issues, including Buddhist perspectives, and to consider these issues in comparative perspective.

The second set of issues we consider relates to personal growth. These questions relate to psychological issues and are an opportunity to present Buddhist psychological theories, including Buddhist methods for dealing with anger, attachment, jealousy, and other emotional afflictions (kleśas). This is a good opportunity for students to relate the Buddhist teachings to their own lives and learn to distinguish between love and romantic attraction, to reflect on values of compassion, to understand the importance of developing wisdom for making skillful decisions in their lives, and to question the violence and consumerism of contemporary society. Examining these very practical matters from a Buddhist perspective can be very beneficial for college students just starting out in life in a very dangerous and uncertain world. The fact that Buddhism does not require membership, conversion, acceptance of dogma, or any kind of allegiance gains students’ trust. They are astute enough to understand the universality and practical benefit of understanding their own minds better and infusing their human relationships with more compassion and loving kindness, letting go of expectation in dealing with others, relaxing the habitual clinging to one’s “self” and one’s desires. They may not understand the subtleties of the various Buddhist philosophical systems, but they can understand and appreciate these practical methods for coping with the problems of life in a stressful world.

The third set of issues includes social justice concerns. I was an undergraduate student at the University of California at Berkeley during the social upheavals of the 1960s and participated in demonstrations protesting racism, the Vietnam war, and other social injustices. On my way to classes on Japanese literature, I encountered riot police, tanks on the street corners, and soldiers with fixed bayonets that the U.S. government had called out to quell the students’ democratic right to voice dissent against social injustices and an illegal, immoral, misguided, and massively destructive war effort. These experiences powerfully shaped my social consciousness. When we consider the problems of the world – the AIDS pandemic; economic exploitation; environmental degredation; unthinkable cruelty toward women, children, and animals; grinding poverty; and the plethora of armed conflicts raging around the globe – I strongly feel that people of peace who care about the future of humanity have a moral obligation to voice our opposition. The world is moving in some very dangerous directions. There is more human slavery in the world today than ever before in human history. The threat of nuclear annihilation is greater now that ever before and the world’s largest nuclear power is bent on global domination with over half its population in support of a dangerous course of preemptive warfare.

Every semester I have 100 students whose minds are still open to new ideas and new ways of dealing with conflict and other human problems. In the syllabus of each of my classes, I have added units on relevant social issues: environment, economic ethics, gender issues (including issues of women and homosexuality), bioethics, politics, and war and peace. These units provide opportunity to raise such issues as the ethics of abortion, capital punishment, human slavery, the dangers of religious nationalism, gender violence, economic exploitation, and the slaughter of millions of Buddhists in Tibet, China, Cambodia, and Vietnam over the past 50 years. The university classroom is a suitable place to introduce students to human tragedies in religious history, such as the sexual exploitation of Korea’s “comfort women,” religious violence such as that in Sri Lanka, and political oppression such as that in Cambodia, Mongolia, and Tibet. Professors can encourage their students to think critically about how these tragedies occurred and how they might have been averted. Relating the course subject matter to contemporary events in the real world helps to bring the material alive.
Strategies and Perspectives

Teaching Buddhism to students in American universities provides unique challenges and opportunities. The course description of my Buddhist Faith and Practice class, which is included on the syllabus that students receive the first day of classes, explains that the course is designed to introduce the fundamental doctrines and practices of the major Buddhist traditions and to help students develop an informed appreciation of the variety of philosophical perspectives and religious practices that are found in Buddhist cultures. The course begins with a discussion of the legends surrounding the Buddha's life and the core Buddhist philosophical tenets. Next, it traces the historical, literary, and cultural developments that occurred as Buddhism spread to new lands and social environments. Next, through dialogue and debate, it encourages students to explore the enduring questions of the human experience from within a Buddhist-comparative framework. The latter part of the semester focuses on social and ethical concerns, examining Buddhist responses to contemporary social issues, including the natural environment, gender, bioethics, economics, politics, and peace. The course explores the Buddhist traditions through literature, film, and open dialogue. Excursions to Buddhist temples enable students to directly experience a wide variety of Buddhist cultures and practices. Students are encouraged to bring their own background and experience to bear upon the perennial questions of the human experience as they examine Buddhist beliefs and practices.

Fostering critical thinking skills is a key element of liberal arts education. The historical critical method is used by academics not only in their own research, but also in the classroom. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity to apply theoretical analysis to the subject matter they are studying and to consider topics from a broad range of perspectives: historical, philosophical, sociological, political, economic, and feminist. The historical critical method requires both professors and students to be aware of their own biases and the underlying assumptions they bring with them as they approach the material. It requires that they take nothing for granted and thoroughly question not only their own preconceptions about the material, but also biases that may be present in the texts. Bringing critical thinking into the classroom means actively raising difficult and controversial issues, which require skillful handling, but creating a safe environment for intellectual inquiry is precisely what liberal arts education is all about.

To engage students in the subject matter more enthusiastically, I find an interactive approach very helpful. As students are trying to grasp new concepts of Buddhist philosophy, they have plenty of opportunities to ask questions. Once students have a basic background in the subject matter, they are given class time to discuss specific questions among themselves: Could Buddhism work just as well without the theory of rebirth? What aspects of Buddhist theory are relevant to contemporary debates on the environment? How can Buddhist theories about life and death inform contemporary discussions on bioethical issues, such as cloning and stem cell research? What aspect of Buddhist psychology do you find relevant to your life? How might Buddhists deal with the war in Iraq? I also use videos in the classroom to spark discussion about various aspects of Buddhist anthropology and have created a library of video resources that students can explore on their own. I encourage students to analyze the Buddhist beliefs and practices as portrayed in contemporary film, music, and literature against the original Buddhist texts and images from ancient Buddhist art. I challenge them to find Buddhist elements in advertising and examine how Buddhist themes are being represented and misrepresented.

The other interactive approach I use in teaching Buddhism at the university is to introduce students to Buddhist temples and activities in their own locality: Asian Buddhist temples, Asian American Buddhist temples, and other Buddhist groups. In the last 15 years, due to immigration, many Buddhist temples have been established in the San Diego area. These temples belong to the Cambodian, Chinese, Korean, Laotian, Thai, and Vietnamese traditions and they all welcome visitors. In addition, there are Japanese American
temples that have been established since the early 1900s and a number of meditation groups and study
groups that also welcome students. To help students find and contact these temples and practice centers, I
have prepared a two-page sheet that lists the temples’ names, abbots, addresses, telephone numbers, email
contacts, and web pages. The sheet, titled “Buddhist Temples, Centers, and Meditation Groups,” currently
lists 28 temples and centers and is arranged into seven categories: Theravāda, Chinese, Japanese, Korean,
Tibetan, Vietnamese, and Other Groups. The list is updated every semester to reflect changes in location
and contact information. To ensure that students understand and show respect for Buddhist customs when
visiting the temples, I provide a one-page sheet titled “Temple Etiquette” that provides information on
appropriate dress and behavior. Students are required to visit two temples and to submit a four-page Field
Research Report documenting these temple visits and critically analyzing some aspect of their experience.
A sheet of guidelines for writing these reports includes general instructions, attitudes and methodologies,
and writing tips.

Students are free to choose the sites of their field research. The visits to Asian Buddhist temples provide
students with an introduction to Buddhism as it is lived and practiced in Asian Buddhist cultures today and
raises important issues about how Asian Buddhists are adapting their beliefs and practices in the United
States and how they are transmitting them to the younger generation. The visits to Japanese American
Buddhist temples illuminate how early Japanese immigrants adapted their traditions in order to maintain
their Buddhist beliefs and practices in the United States. In the early twentieth century, Asian immigrants
were not welcome and Buddhism was often considered the work of the devil. In order to survive in this
racist and religiously dogmatic environment, church pews replaced tatami mats, hymnals replaced sūtras,
and married ministers replaced celibate monks. A visit to a Japanese Buddhist temple raises many important
social concerns and also questions about what is gained and what is lost in the process of accommodation.
A visit to a non-Asian Buddhist group raises another host of issues. These groups are varied, including silent
meditations, walking meditations, chanting, study, and group discussions. These groups are comfortable
for students, because they are conducted in English and are culturally familiar. At the same time, students
are often surprised to find that the level of Buddhist understanding is quite rudimentary and sometimes
confused. This type of experience raises important questions about the value of traditional learning programs,
the lifestyles of Buddhist monastics and laity, and the advantages and disadvantages of adjusting, amending,
and reinterpreting Buddhism in new cultural environments.

Another methodology I have found useful in teaching Buddhism is a comparative approach. When we
place two religious or philosophical systems side by side, the unique developments and contributions of
each become accentuated. This methodology is not only useful for interfaith dialogue and for Buddhism
ecumemical dialogue, but also for understanding Buddhism. In presenting Buddhist beliefs and practices,
I make comparisons and draw contrasts other religious and also non-religious systems. For example, when
explaining the Buddha’s teachings, I ask students to identify what elements of these teachings were based
on earlier Indian belief and practice, what elements of earlier Indian belief and practice the Buddha rejected,
and what is new and innovative in the Buddha’s teachings. Delineating the Buddha’s teachings from earlier
Indian systems helps students clarify their understanding. Drawing parallels and contrasts between such
concepts of God and Buddha, fate and karma, soul and no-self, heaven and nirvāna raises important issues
for discussion.

Cultural Differences

To return to the question originally posed in this paper, it is clear that the presentation of Buddhadharma
is sure to be different in the North American context. Whether the essence of the teachings will be lost,
preserved, or perhaps enhanced by the Dharma’s transition to a new cultural, social, and intellectual
environment remains to be seen. In some ways, traditional Buddhist and contemporary North American
cultures appear to be diametrically opposite and continually drifting further apart. The ways in which Buddhism is learned, taught, and understood also appear radically different, at least to outward appearances. Based on the many differences between Asian and North American political and intellectual histories, cultural and religious traditions, psychological attitudes, and contemporary priorities, it is natural that people in Asian and the West approach Buddhism from different perspectives. Elsewhere I have analyzed the work of the anthropologist Melford Spiro and his theoretical framework for understanding traditional approaches to Buddhism, based on fieldwork conducted in Burma. He identifies three traditional approaches: (1) apotropaic Buddhism, meaning ritual practices for protection and blessing; (2) kammatic Buddhism, meaning practices to accumulate merit; and nibbanic Buddhism, meaning practices leading to the achievement of liberation (nirvāṇa) particularly through meditation.

From my experience of living among Buddhists in Asia for twenty years, I believe that this theoretical framework is very useful for understanding how Asian Buddhists approach their traditions. The same framework does not seem as applicable to Buddhists from other parts of the world, however. Although there are surely North American Buddhists who look to Buddhism for blessings and protection, some who engage in Buddhist practices to accumulate good karma, and some who strive to achieve liberation from samsāra through their Dharma practice, there are also other reasons to explain their affinities to the Buddhist traditions, reasons that are often more practically oriented.

In place of Spiro’s three traditional approaches to Buddhism, I suggest a new theoretical framework with three different orientations that may more accurately describe the ways that Western people approach Buddhism. These three are: (1) a therapeutic approach, (2) a philosophical approach, and (3) a social justice approach. The first approach, the therapeutic approach, denotes that Western people find Buddhist meditation and psychology helpful for dealing with the problems they encounter in their lives. In place of (or sometimes in addition to) psychotherapy, they are finding Buddhist methods for dealing with fear, attachment, anger, and grief to be extremely practical and effective. The second approach, the philosophical approach, denotes that people are finding Buddhism useful for dealing with existential issues, such as the meaning of human existence, the origins of the world and human life, and questions about what happens to human persons after death. In many cases, Buddhism provides a fresh perspective and an alternative to prevailing scientific materialist views and traditional religious views. Western people who have been raised to think critically find refreshing Buddhism’s mandate to question all theories, a view that is affirmed in the Kalama Sūtra.

The third approach, the social justice approach, denotes that people are attracted to Buddhism because it offers a vision for a peaceful society and an agenda for social change. Not only have traditional religions, governments, and politicians failed to achieve a peaceful society, but social problems also continue to grow at an alarming rate. In this environment, students often become disillusioned, cynical, and may immerse themselves in drugs, alcohol, video games, shopping, or other pursuits to distract their minds from problems they feel powerless to resolve. The thoughtful students among them appreciate Buddhists’ willingness to take a stand against war and capital punishment and their willingness to openly address such politically sensitive issues as homosexuality, abortion, stem cell research, and global economics.

These three new approaches to Buddhism have not a direct link to the traditional approaches that Spiro sets forth. Blessings, protective rituals, accumulations of good karma, and nirvāṇa all seem quite remote from the mindset of the practical, inquiring minds of North Americans, who are more concerned with getting their heads together, understanding what they are doing in life, and figuring out what to do about the state of the world. Perhaps their concerns and their approaches represent a different Dharma, but they may also simply represent a new form for the system of inquiry that represents the Buddhadharma’s very foundation.
NOTES


2. The course description of my Buddhist Faith and Practice class is included on the syllabus that students receive the first day of classes. The syllabus explains that the course is designed to introduce the fundamental doctrines and practices of the major Buddhist traditions and to help students develop an informed appreciation of the variety of philosophical perspectives and religious practices that are found in Buddhist cultures. The course begins with a discussion of the legends surrounding the Buddha's life and the core Buddhist philosophical tenets. Next, it traces the historical, literary, and cultural developments that occurred as Buddhism spread to new lands and social environments. Next, through dialogue and debate, it encourages students to explore the enduring questions of the human experience from within a Buddhist-comparative framework. The latter part of the semester focuses on social and ethical concerns, examining Buddhist responses to contemporary social issues, including the natural environment, gender, bioethics, economics, politics, and peace. The course explores the Buddhist traditions through literature, film, and open dialogue. Excursions to Buddhist temples enable students to directly experience a wide variety of Buddhist cultures and practices. Students are encouraged to bring their own background and experience to bear upon the perennial questions of the human experience as they examine Buddhist beliefs and practices.

3. General instructions include: “Get clear directions to the site of your visit to facilitate a timely arrival,” “Arrive a few minutes before services begin, out of respect and to get good seats,” and “Dress appropriately.”

4. The section on attitudes and methodologies includes advice on perspectives (“Be alert to distinguish critical analysis from judgmentalism”), approaches (“Have a specific topic or question in mind as you approach your field research. Consider ways to tie your field research into your personal and academic interests, e.g., anthropology, sociology, women’s studies, ritual, philosophy, etc. Have a backup topic in mind in case your original topic proves infeasible.”), methodologies (“Have a specific methodology in mind as you approach your research, e.g., comparative analysis, philosophical analysis, interdisciplinary approach, interviews, etc.”), and interview protocol (“Interviews and inquiry are valuable means of collecting data for your report. For best results, select an informed interviewee, request permission to ask questions, ask questions relevant to your topic of research, and frame questions clearly and in a respectful voice.”), as well as reminders about academic integrity.


Everyday Practice
Dhamma in Everyday Life

Anne Mahoney

The Four Noble Truths, discovered by the Lord Buddha reflect the core of Buddhist doctrine. The noble truth of dukkha (dissatisfaction), taṇhā (craving), nibbāna (freedom), and magga (noble eightfold path) are universal truths. Briefly the Four Noble Truths state: existence is dukkha, the cause of dukkha is craving, the liberation from dukkha is nibbāna and the path to the liberation is the Noble Eightfold Path. Daily life provides many opportunities to experience each of these Four Noble Truths. Lay Buddhists are able to develop a deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings through mindful awareness and mindful reflection on these Four Noble Truths as they arise in day-to-day life. This paper reviews each of the Four Noble Truths and discusses various ways that each truth can be experienced.

First Noble Truth: The Noble Truth of Dukkha

Suffering is all around us. Poverty and violence lead to suffering. Everyday disappointments and everyday pleasures also lead to suffering. Both are a source of dukkha and both provide an opportunity to experience the Buddha’s teachings.

The Buddha spoke of three kinds of dukkha. The first, ordinary dissatisfaction, includes both mental and physical stress. This reflects the type of stress that everyone experiences. Birth, illness, old age, death, being separated from loved ones and pleasant conditions, association with unloved ones and unpleasant conditions, not getting what one wants, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are all examples of ordinary dukkha. Typically when you are exposed to ordinary dukkha, you deny it, ignore it or distract yourself from it, rather than face it. The Buddha said you are to understand dukkha, not run away from it. To do this, you must investigate dukkha. In order to investigate dukkha, you must be willing to acknowledge the dukkha in your lives. At this very moment, as you read this page you may be experiencing some form of physical or mental dukkha. Your body may be in pain, your mind may be restless, preoccupied or your reactions to this paper may be emotionally charged with aversion or greed for more information. All of this is dukkha. Stop reading for a moment. Bring your awareness to your body. Are there any unpleasant sensations there? If so, watch them, become aware of your judgment of those sensations and your desire to make the unpleasant sensations go away. This is dukkha. Now become aware of your thoughts and emotions. Are there any unpleasant (negative) thoughts or disturbing emotions (irritation, anger, boredom, restlessness, anxiety) present? If so, this is dukkha. Acknowledge any thoughts and emotions that are present. Become aware of your judgment regarding those thoughts or emotions. This is also dukkha.

The second type of dukkha is the stress you experience because things are always changing. This is the law of impermanence. The Buddha said, whatever is impermanent is suffering. You can experience this truth for yourself, as impermanence is very easy to become aware of in your daily lives. When you look at yourself in the mirror and compare that image with a picture of yourself at a younger age it is evident that you have changed physically. This is impermanence of form. You may enjoy the sensation of
the sun on your body but if you remain in the sun for long the sensation of the heat becomes unpleasant. This is impermanence of feeling. You may wake up in the morning happy, by noon you are angry. This is impermanence of consciousness. Yesterday you may have thought “I like my job.” Today you may think, “I hate my job.” This is impermanence of thought.

Impermanence is often covered up by continuity. By repeating the same things over and over you create the delusion that things are permanent. You wake up at the same time each day and go through your daily routine. Soon, that routine begins to feel stable and you begin to rely on the routine. As you become more and more attached to the routine, you experience dukkha when the routine is disrupted. In fact, the routine was never regular or stable, it was just repeated over and over again. If you take the time to reflect on how different the routine is each time you go through it you will be able to see through the delusion of permanence and see the reality of impermanence.

The third type of dukkha is the stress associated with the five aggregates. All living beings are composed of the five aggregates. The five aggregates are body (form), sensations, perceptions, thoughts (mental formations) and consciousness. There is nothing else. No permanent soul or self. In your daily life you can experience this aspect of dukkha when you become aware of your inability to control your body, sensations, perceptions, thoughts, emotions, or level of consciousness. Your body hurts and gets tired when you do not want it to. You may experience unpleasant sensations (hot or cold or pain) even though you do not want to experience such sensations. You may have false perceptions despite your best efforts not to do so. For example, the coiled rope on the back porch looks like a snake in the twilight of the day. You may think thoughts that disturb you or leave you feeling angry or guilty. These occurrences happen, you do not have control over them. If the aggregates truly “belonged” to you, you would feel, think, perceive what you wanted, when you wanted. You do not have control over the occurrence of these phenomena. This is what is meant by the dukkha of conditioned things. Again, you are able to observe this dukkha, if you know what to watch for and if you are willing to be present with the stress of not having control, rather than running away from this reality through distraction, blame or denial.

What is the purpose of attending to dukkha? The Buddha said that the only way to understand dukkha is to experience it. It is not enough to know dukkha intellectually. Only through the experience of dukkha can you penetrate the First Noble Truth. It is mindfulness that allows one to observe dukkha in everyday life without becoming caught up in it. Mindfulness is non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Such awareness allows you to observe without attachment. The Buddha realized the truth of dukkha through the practice of vipassanā (insight). You too can use mindfulness on a daily basis to help us also realize the truth of dukkha.

Second Noble Truth: The Noble Truth of the Cause of Dukkha

Greed, desire, thirst, lust, yearning, affection and attachment are some of the characteristics included under the term craving. Craving is the mental factor that underlies all dukkha. As the Buddha indicated, there are three types of craving: craving for sense pleasures, craving for existence and craving for nonexistence. Craving for sense pleasures is most easily recognized in daily life.

When you experience dissatisfaction, pain or stress it is often because of your craving for or your attachment to, sense objects. Craving arises in all six sense bases. You crave pleasant sights, pleasant sounds, taste sensations, smells, pleasant touch sensations and pleasant thoughts. You also crave to be rid of unpleasant sensations. You crave to be rid of unpleasant sounds, sights, smells, tastes, pain and unpleasant thoughts. Stop reading for a moment. Bring your awareness to your body. Are there any unpleasant sensations there? If so, become aware of your judgment of those sensations and your desire to make the unpleasant sensations go away. This desire is craving. Now become aware of your thoughts and emotions. Are there any unpleasant (negative) thoughts or disturbing emotions (irritation, anger, boredom, restlessness, anxiety) present? If
so, become aware of your judgment of those thoughts and emotions. Can you be aware of your desire to feel peaceful and happy? That desire to be rid of the negative thoughts and emotions is craving. When you experience pleasant sensations (tastes, sounds, smells, sights, touch sensations or thoughts) you often want those pleasant sensations to continue or to be repeated. If you are currently experiencing any pleasant sensations, mindfully watch those sensations and try to be aware of the disappointment or discomfort that arises when those pleasant sensations cease. This disappointment or discomfort is because of craving.

As you go through your daily life you can, with the use of mindfulness, become aware of the cravings which occur routinely. When you wake up in the morning, you may have an unpleasant sensation in your stomach, which you label as hunger and you crave food. When you eat more food than your stomach requires, you may again have an unpleasant sensation, and you crave for that unpleasant sensation to go away. While walking to work you are confronted with unpleasant odors, such as gasoline fumes or pollution in the city, suffering arises as you crave those unpleasant sensations to dissipate. Alternately, you may pass a vendor and the pleasant smell of spicy food is in the air and you find yourself drawn to that olfactory sense and crave that food. Attachment to your ideas and opinions is another aspect of craving. At work you may become attached to your ideas and want co-workers to agree with them. You may also become attached to rites and rituals, philosophy or religion. All of this is craving for pleasant sense objects.

The craving for existence is associated with belief in future life. When one acts to gain merit in the hope of having a happier rebirth, one is caught in craving for existence. Alternatively, craving for non-existence is based on the belief there is no consequence to action and the belief there is no life after death nor any future existence.

In order to become experientially aware of the relationship between craving and dukkha it is necessary to use mindfulness to investigate craving or attachment. While mindfully being aware of a craving, one is able to understand the connection between craving and dissatisfaction. It is not the sensation of hunger that is unsatisfactory, but the desire to get rid of the sensation that leads to dissatisfaction. It is only through this experiential understanding that one begins to penetrate the Second Noble Truth.

Craving is insatiable; it is only the object of craving that changes. Craving cannot be ended through force of will. Such suppression serves only to increase the power of craving in the long run. The only way to let go of craving is through the experiential understanding that craving does not provide satisfaction but in fact leads to more craving. This understanding grows as you become mindfully aware, over and over again, of cravings you experience as you go through daily life. As you develop an experiential awareness of how cravings rise and fall away, how they are not satisfying in the long-term, but require being fed over and over again and consequently produce more and more craving; you begin to understand the dissatisfaction inherent in all craving.

Third Noble Truth: The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Dukkha

The Third Noble Truth is the noble truth of nibbāna, which means freedom from craving. It is not possible to experience nibbāna directly until path and fruit moments have been experienced. It is possible in your day-to-day life to get a glimpse of what it means to let go of craving. Every time you are able to be mindful and watch craving rise and fall away, without acting on that craving, you can experience the sense of peace and stillness which results from letting go. As you walk to work and smell the unpleasant gasoline fumes, be mindful, just be aware of the sense smell rise and fall away (rather than becoming angry, nauseous, etc.), then you can experience what it means to let go of craving. Similarly, as you pass the vendor with the attractive smell of spicy food, if you can allow that sense to be present without craving, you know freedom from craving. At times this is difficult to do and then you must watch the craving itself. Through the use of mindfulness it is possible to be aware of the craving but not act on it. For example, when you come home after work and your children are making a lot of noise you may be aware of anger arising in you and may
recognize this *dukkha* (the anger) as desire for peace and quiet. Ordinarily, you may yell at your children and tell them to be quiet, in this way you would be giving in to the craving and indirectly intensifying craving. If you are able to mindfully watch the desire for the children to be quiet and allow that desire to dissipate without making judgement or without taking any action, then, this is the moment of letting go, a moment of peace, ease, and freedom. Once you have let go of the anger, you are better able to speak to your children about the noise in a calm and relaxed manner.

**The Fourth Noble Truth: The Way to the End of *Dukkha***

The Noble Eightfold Path is the way to liberation, the method outlined by the Buddha for ending suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path is comprised of three aspects, *pañña* (wisdom), *sīla* (morality), and *samādhi* (mental training). Often it is only the *sīla* aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path that is emphasized for lay followers of the Buddha. However, it is possible to practice all three aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path in daily life.

*Sīla* involves right speech, right action and right livelihood. Right speech includes abstaining from lies, harsh speech, cruel speech, gossip and useless speech. Right action involves abstaining from killing, stealing, over indulging the sense faculties (usually spoken of as refraining from inappropriate sexual activity) and the use of drugs and alcohol. Right livelihood is abstaining from occupations that cause harm to oneself or others.

On a deeper level, *sīla* also involves living life in a non-harmful compassionate manner. Cultivating the *brahmavihāras* (loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity) can develop this. When you cultivate the *brahmavihāras*, you automatically practice right speech, right action and right livelihood. By learning to live the *brahmavihāras*, you learn to speak to others with kindness, understanding and compassion. You learn to act with compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. You can be truly joyful for others success and you are able to do so from a place of understanding and compassion rather then from a place of anger or fear.

Living the *brahmavihāras*, does not mean living passively but rather acting in a way of non-harm to help yourself and others. For example, when you need to discipline your children or disagree with your spouse, you are able to do so from a place of understanding and compassion rather then from a place of anger or fear.

Cultivation of the *brahmavihāras* also allows you to experience aspects of the *pañña* category of the Noble Eightfold Path in your daily life. Right thought is the thought of non-harm, loving kindness, non-cruelty, compassion and renunciation (letting go). Every time you are momentarily able to let go of your craving, opinions, ideas, or attachments, you are practicing one aspect of renunciation. When you live the *brahmavihāras*, you are practicing the other aspects of right thought. When you experience impermanence, *dukkha* and non-self in your day-to-day affairs, you are practicing right understanding, the second component of the wisdom category. In this way you are able to experientially begin to understand the wisdom category of the Noble Eightfold Path as part of your daily experience.

The final aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path, the *samādhi* aspect, relates to meditation practice. A daily meditation practice allows us to fulfill this aspect using right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration to balance and train the mind to see things as they really are: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and coreless. You cannot practice right concentration in your daily routine but you can practice right mindfulness and right effort.

Right effort is the effort to abstain from unwholesome thoughts, to replace unwholesome thoughts when they do arise with wholesome thoughts, to cultivate wholesome thoughts which have not yet arisen and to maintain wholesome thoughts which have already arisen. You engage in this effort when you are mindful and are able to see the arising of unwholesome thoughts, speech or actions and then use right effort to substitute those thoughts, speech or actions with wholesome ones. You engage in this effort whenever you
practice the brahmavihāras. For example, when you hear an unpleasant sound, rather than just becoming angry or irritated, you can reflect on the source of the dukkha, leading to the sound. You may reflect on how the person is suffering, that would lead them to yell in such a way. Compassion then arises and through this practice of right effort one has turned an unwholesome mental reaction into a wholesome mental reaction.

Right mindfulness is the awareness of the four foundations of mindfulness; mindfulness of body, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of mind and mindfulness of content of mind. Again, as you go through your daily lives, being mindfully aware of your body sensations, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and level of consciousness, allows you to practice right mindfulness in your day-to-day life. The Four Noble Truths discovered by the Lord Buddha reflect the core of Buddhist doctrine. Dukkha is all around us. Everyday disappointments and everyday pleasures also lead to suffering. Both are a source of dukkha and both provide an opportunity to experience the Buddha’s teaching. Similarly, craving surrounds us. Craving is any form of judgment or emotional desire to have things different than the way they actually are. The noble truth of nibbāna is experienced when you let go of the craving and accept the situation as it is. In daily life you have a vast array of opportunities to practice letting go. When you let go you are free.

You can practice the sīla aspect of the path when you interact with your children, spouse, or community, through living the brahmavihāras. You develop pañña in two ways: (a) through cultivation of the loving friendliness (mettā), compassion (karunā), appreciative joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā) and (b) reflection on the three characteristics impermanence (anicca), dissatisfaction (dukkha), corelessness (anattā) inherent in all (conditioned) phenomena.

You develop mental discipline, samādhi, through the practice of vipassanā. Vipassanā can be practiced as you go through your daily lives. You can develop moment-to-moment awareness of your body, sensations, emotions, moods, and thoughts. In this way, you experience the four foundations of mindfulness in your daily lives and do not have to remove yourself from your daily lives to experience and understand the Lord Buddha’s teachings.
Dhamma in Daily Life: How to Deal with Anger

Bhikkhunī Lieu Phap

Anger is a common emotion among human beings. Everybody gets angry at some time and to some extent, when facing someone or something that is unpleasant. But it is interesting to know how anger is defined by the wise men in the past and by scholars in modern times.

What is Anger?

The Bhagavad Gītā says: “Desire springs from attachment; anger arises from desire. Both attachment and anger are products of energy of mind. Anger is a door to hell because it leads to the destruction of self.”

Sankara’s view is that anger arises from the obstruction of a desire by an agent, conscious or unconscious. The Sāmkhya School maintains that a person encountering opposition, obstruction or defeat from some person gets angry. Anger is a modification of the rajas (energy) due to the non-fulfillment of a desire.

In Buddhist psychology, anger is described as “a disordered temper, the getting upset, opposition, hostility, churlishness, abruptness, or disgust of heart.” As defined in the dictionary, anger is the strong emotion that you feel when you think that someone has behaved in an unfair, cruel, or unacceptable way.

Raymond Lloyd Richmond said that anger is a feeling of being against someone or something. It is a hostile emotion that sets people against each other, or even against themselves. He further said that anger may be a “natural” psychological reaction to hurt and insult, but being natural doesn’t make it good for us. Poisons, for example, are also natural, and poisons, by definition, are deadly. And so there are far better ways to cope with hurt and insult than with anger.

Though very strong, anger is a secondary emotion, meaning it is preceded by other feelings, such as pain or fear. Anger has the same root as the word “anguish” (meaning agony and distress) and “angst” (meaning anxious fear), suggesting its unpleasant nature and origin.

Being mental, anger has no form, but it is easy to know when one is angry because anger is expressed remarkably on the body. As some psychologists describe, “anger is expressed by blood-shot eyes, frowning, grinding of teeth, throbbing of the cheeks, biting of the lips, clenching the fists, thumping them, beating, throwing on the ground, oppression, seizing, throwing of weapons, drawing or shedding blood, cutting, etc.” However, some people express anger in a rather calm way by keeping silent while boiling inside. But even in that case, angry people are not pleasant and friendly at all, and this affects their relationships with other people.

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Anger

Though we all know that anger is a destructive emotion, we still get angry, and sometimes even indulge in it. It is because anger does have some advantages. That is why the Buddha said that anger has a poisoned root (visamūla) and a honeyed tip (madhuragga). The commentary explained that anger has a poisoned
root because it results in suffering and it has a honeyed tip (*madhuragga*) because pleasure arises when one returns anger with anger, abuse with abuse, or a blow with a blow.

When one gets angry, one has the sense of power and control. For example, a mother yells at her kids, and they quiet down for a little while. Anger at our own weakness can motivate us to change or develop inner strength. In some cases, anger at injustice or mistreatment can help us stand up for a good cause. It can also help to vent frustration and release tension. The Dalai Lama says that if we examine the way anger arises there is a sense that it comes as a protector, as a friend that would help our battle in taking revenge against the person who has inflicted harm on us; but in reality that is an illusion. It is a very delusory state of mind. Thus if we consider further, we can see that anger does not help in the long run, and there are other ways to feel powerful, secure and appreciated by others.

Concerning the disadvantages of anger, the Buddha has said in the *suttas* that there are seven conditions that come upon an angry woman or man:

Monks, this sort of person, being angry, is overcome by anger; he is subverted by anger: and however well he be bathed, anointed, trimmed as to the hair and beard, clad in spotless linen, yet for all that he is ugly, being overwhelmed by anger; …he sleeps badly, he lies in discomfort, being overwhelmed by anger; …he might not prosper; …he had no wealth; …he had no fame; …he is without friends; …on the breaking up of the body after death he might be reborn in the untoward way, the ill way, the abyss, the hell.

From our own experience and by observing others, we can see that we look ugly when we are angry. At the intense moment of anger we tend to throw away everything, and feel distant even from the nearest and dearest ones. It is because anger overwhelms and destroys the peace of our mind. Glenn R. Schiraldi and Melissa Hallmark Kerr, in their research on anger, have specified a long list of the costs of getting anger. First, anger makes us to be viewed negatively by others and creates a bad impression in them. Anger tends to activate anger in others, instigates aggression, retaliation, and sabotage by others. It interferes with problem solving, impairs judgment, alienates others, and sour relationships. It causes people to avoid giving us potentially useful feedback because of fear, and consequently it leads to conflict with others. Anger robs us of happiness, joy, peace and harmony with others. Sometimes by lack of control, anger can lead to unpleasant guilt, which leads to repent and damage of self-esteem and worse, we may set a rotten example for our juniors or children. Repeated anger is connected with long-term health problems. Those prone to anger, hostility, and aggression are at higher risk for high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, stroke, death from all causes, and job injuries. They might be at greater risk for headache, backache, cancer, ulcer, and gastrointestinal disturbance. They are more likely to smoke and relapse from psychological illness. There are more disadvantages for getting angry, but we can conclude with a brief remark of Śntideva, “There is nobody who lives happily with anger.” It is important to contemplate and see the disadvantages of anger, see that it is a fault, a troublemaker in our lives. The Buddha compared ill-will, anger and aversion to an enemy. Whatever harmful things an enemy would wish towards us, anger can do all those things to us very effectively.

Why Does Anger Arise?

Having seen the disadvantages of anger, we want to stop it, but in order to do so, first, we should trace the cause of anger. Generally, we get angry when we feel that we ourselves or our dear ones are treated unfairly. Just because we care, we cannot bear the injustice, and anger arises from the desire to protect others and ourselves. Thus, though caring is a very good quality, it can lead to unwholesome reaction if we do not know
How to channel that caring. Anger usually results from some emotional hurt; that is, in being threatened or frustrated in some way. We get angry when we feel rejected, disrespected, powerless, and vulnerable. Then we have the desire to hurt someone just as we have been hurt. Sometimes unrealistic expectations are the cause of anger. We often expect so much from ourselves, our colleagues, our children, our living circumstances, and when things don’t happen as we expect, we feel disappointed, and discontented. Sometimes stress affects our feelings – people who are under a lot of pressure tend to get angry more easily. And part of it may be our personality – we may just be someone who has a short fuse or who feels our emotions intensely, due to the intensity of the latent tendency of anger (patighānusaya) in our minds.

Though objectively anger arises in response to undesirable people or circumstances, its true origin is subjective and internal, which is the perception of ego in our mind. Aversion and anger arise from ego, nothing else. As Ajahn Jagaro has rightly remarked, we like that which gratifies and flatters the ego. On the contrary, we don’t like that which challenges the ego, threatens the ego, insults the ego, humiliates the ego. The ego doesn’t like that so it reacts with aversion and anger. If there is no ego, there will be no problem. The Buddha had no ego and therefore he was at peace and he was a blessing to the world, a blessing to all beings.

How to Deal with Anger

Sometimes we may think that if we do not get angry, then we are just being like a vegetable, too passive. We may view it as a negative thing not to do anything but endure all the injustice done to us. But the fact is that anger is not the best weapon to fight for justice, because we all know what harm anger may bring to others and ourselves. In some cases, when necessary, we should take action to correct the wrongdoings, but we should do so with strength, calmness, and kindness, not with a heart of destruction. In other words, it is possible to take strong countermeasures, but without malice or hatred.

Some psychologists suggest that we should express our anger so that there will be no suppression, which leads to many kinds of disease. But other psychologists are right when saying that venting anger does not work. They said that even though it might give some immediate satisfaction, venting anger (catharsis) – whether by yelling obscenities, making obscene gestures, honking the horn of your car, throwing or breaking things, or screaming insults – does nothing to dispel anger. More often than not, it actually pumps up our emotional arousal and may even prolong it.

Maybe the most popular way in managing anger is to avoid the irritating persons or situations. If we feel we cannot bear a particular person or situation, that we are prone to get angry when coming into contact with them, then it is better to keep away from them. This avoidance should be both physical and mental, which means we would not let them be present even in our mind and disturb our inner peace. Though this is an easy way not to get angry, we cannot do it all the time, and we should admit that it is not the best way to uproot our anger. On the contrary, we should learn how to peacefully coexist with that which we don’t like. So we should be well equipped with the thought that nothing and nobody is perfect, that people are not all good or all bad, but are a combination of good and bad attributes of various degrees. We should accept that people are fallible, and give everyone space to be different, to make mistakes, as imperfection is common to all humanity. Allowing failing and shortcoming in us and in others is a sign of patience and tolerance, which is an antidote to anger.

One of the problems concerning anger is that we feel right to get angry; and because we feel right, we totally identify with our anger. Therefore, the first thing we should do to deal with anger is not identify with it. We should feel it very clearly as a sensation, how it arises, grows, and passes away. This mindfulness of sensations can help us to see anger from the viewpoint of an objective observer, no more being identified and controlled by it. So any time we get angry, just stop and observe. Just take a moment of mindfulness to
see what it feels like. Under the influence of mindfulness, anger will lose its power and gradually subside. We do not suppress anger, but just observe it and let it go. This is considered a middle way between expression and suppression.

We can also use some kind of reasoning to stop anger. We may ask ourselves what we can do to another person by being angry with him. We cannot destroy his virtue and his other good qualities. The Buddha used to say that being angry with others is like wishing to hit someone by taking hold of glowing coals, or a heated iron-rod, or of excrement. We will be the first person to get hurt or to get stained. And, in the same way, if other persons are angry with us, what can he do to us? Can he destroy our virtue and our other good qualities?

Therefore, self-esteem is another antidote to anger. Self-esteem is defined as “a realistic, appreciative opinion of oneself.” It means that we see ourselves accurately and honestly, neither inflating not deflating our strength or importance. We are aware of our strength and weakness, and are comfortable with who we are inside. Ajahn Chah, a well-known meditation master in Thailand, used to say to his disciples: “If somebody calls you a dog, you just look around and see if you have a tail. If you have got a tail, then you know they are right. If you can’t see a tail, then don’t worry about it. You are not a dog, so what’s the problem?”

So if we know our own value, we don’t need to fight to reassert ourselves if somebody insults us. Then we are safe from attacks, because we know deep inside that nothing others do or say can change our worth as a human being.

Another means to keep away from anger is empathy. “Empathy is seeing the other person’s point of view and feeling what they are feeling…. Empathy understands that hostile people are hurting people, that people who willingly hurt others are not in their right mind.” With empathy we know that the people who are hurting us have some unhealed wounds, insecurities, and fears inside, and accept that if we had the same problems, we might act in the same way. Maybe they are not truly selfish and inconsiderate, but are simply distracted or confused, and therefore we should not accuse them.

To prevent anger, we should change our patterns of thought. We should change our thoughts from a hateful and negative tendency to a calm and positive tendency. Try not to focus on the negative aspects but to see the positive aspects of the problem as well. When something is wrong or not going well, we should find whether there is a remedy for it. If there is, then act accordingly, and if there is not, then just accept it and let it go. Sāntideva has wisely put the questions:

Why be unhappy about something
If it can be remedied?
And what is the use of being unhappy about something
If it cannot be remedied?

He also pointed out a method to prevent the arising of anger: by examining both the immediate and long-term factors that gave rise to the particular act or injury. “If, for instance, someone hits one with a stick, then it is in fact the stick toward which one should direct one’s anger. On the other hand, we could say that it is the root or underlying cause that gives rise to the act with which one should feel angry. In this case, one should direct one’s anger toward that hatred. So why is it that we particularly select the intermediary between the direct cause of our injury, which is the stick, and the indirect, underlying cause, the hatred? We leave these two aside and particularly select the intermediary, the person, and direct all our anger against the person.” With this examination we will see that it is not another person but human nature itself is hurting us, then we can feel compassionate toward that person and can forgive him. One of the Buddha’s advices is: “If anyone should give you a blow with his hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife, you should abandon any desires and any thoughts based on the household life. And herein you should train thus: “My
mind will be unaffected, and I shall utter no evil words; I shall abide compassionate for his welfare, with a mind of loving kindness, without inner hate.”

Loving kindness (mettā) is the best remedy to anger. Mettā means love without a desire to possess but with desire to help, to sacrifice self-interest for the welfare and well being of humanity. Mettā is without any selection or exclusion. If we select a few good friends and exclude a bad person, then we are not practicing mettā. There is one kind of meditation called mettā bhāvana, which “generates powerful thoughts of spiritual love that grows boundless, making consciousness itself infinite and universal, …thoughts that wish all beings to be friendly and never hostile, happy and never unhappy, to enjoy well-being and never be distressed….” The practice of loving kindness will weaken the tendency of negative feeling of anger and ultimately uproot it.

Compassion (karuṇā) is another noble quality that the Buddha encouraged his disciples to cultivate. Compassion is the recognition of suffering and the wish to relieve suffering in oneself and others. Suffering exists in many forms. When someone is churlish, bitter, aggressive, and unreasonable, he or she is sure to be suffering inside and does not know how to behave properly. With compassion, we sympathize with others’ suffering and will not react in the same way to make the situation even worse. Instead of returning hurt with hurt, we care for them and would like to do something to alleviate their suffering.

Forgiving is a wonderfully effective antidote for anger, and is considered “the crown jewel of anger management skills.” “Forgiving means that we choose to release resentment, hatred, bitterness, and desires for revenge for wrongs done to us; it is a way to come to peace with the past.” We can really forgive when we know that others offended us because they are the victims of their own mental defilements and of circumstance, and being angry with their offence only destroys our peace of mind. We forgive so that we are free from our own defilements and suffer less. Ultimately, “forgiving is a personal choice that does not depend on the offender’s deserving it, asking for it, or expressing remorse.” Though forgiving is sometimes very difficult, it is worthwhile practicing for it is the key to our harmony and well-being of the co-existence.

When it is not easy to feel compassionate, or when our capacity of forgiving is still very weak, another skillful means is to develop equanimity. “Equanimity means appreciation, understanding, accepting, coming to terms with, being at peace with the fact that there is a limit to what one can do and can achieve. One just accepts that people are like that and then stands aside.” In order to cultivate equanimity, we should understand and accept the law of kamma. All wholesome and unwholesome kammas (actions) yield fruits. No one can escape the fruit of their actions. So when someone abuses us or cheats us, if we react in the same way, then we too committed an unwholesome kamma. On the contrary, we should believe that whether we take revenge or not, they cannot escape from their kamma. One may think that this attitude is so passive, that we should do something at least to protect ourselves, but sometimes there is nothing we can do, and in that case equanimity is the best means to keep us from getting crazy.

The story of Venerable Sāri is a very inspiring example for all of us who want to learn compassion, tolerance and humility. Once, when the Buddha was staying near Sāvatthi, a certain monk came and told the Buddha that the Venerable Sāriputta had offended him and without asking his pardon had set out on a journey. The Buddha told a monk to summon Venerable Sāriputta to the assembly of monks. On being asked whether it was true he had offended that monk and without asking his pardon had set out on a journey, Venerable Sāriputta said that only a mindless person would do so, and further explained how he practiced and behaved in daily life. He led a modest life with the same qualities as earth, water, fire, wind, etc. “Just as, Lord, people throw upon the earth things clean and unclean, dung, urine, spittle, pus and blood, yet for all that the earth has no revulsion, loathing or disgust towards it; even so, Lord, do I dwell with a heart that is like the earth, vast, exalted and measureless, without hostility and without ill will…” With a mind like that, how could he offend someone? Hearing this, that monk bowed at the feet of the Buddha and confessed that he had foolishly, stupidly, unskillfully made a wrong, false, and untruthful accusation against
Venerable Sriputta and begged pardon from the Buddha. The Buddha forgave him and also asked Venerable Sriputta to forgive him.

As individuals, in families, and in society, we all have our own experience of the destructiveness of anger. Anger is more destructive than any weapon. Anger causes irritation, tension, and distress, and when it is present, happiness cannot be present in the human mind. Since the human tendency is to long for happiness and be averse to unhappiness, one should do something to get rid of one’s own anger. It is not only an individual but also a social problem, because the truth is that, “If you want to change the world, begin by changing yourself.” If we want the world to be more kind, we should treat others with kindness. If we want people to be less violent, we must first be calm and equanimous. This truth is also mentioned by the Buddha in the *Dhammapada*:

Hatred is, indeed, never appeased by hatred in this world. It is appeased only by loving kindness. This is an ancient law.26

May all beings be free from their anger, and live happily without being controlled by anger and hatred.

**NOTES**

2. Ibid., p.111.
3. Ibid., p.113.

18. Dalai Lama, *Healing Anger*, p. 21

19. Ibid., p. 54.


23. Ibid.


The Dhamma is the teaching of liberation in its entirety as discovered, realized, and well proclaimed by the Buddha. The Buddha delivered thousands of Dhamma discourses to diverse audiences of people in various places over a period of 45 years, beginning from the time he attained enlightenment until he passed into final nibbāna (parinibbāna). His teachings were later compiled into scriptures called the Tripitaka, which literally means “three baskets” of the teachings or three sections of the Dhamma literature: the Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka, and Abhidhamma Pitaka.

There are three steps to understanding this Dhamma literature: (1) pariyatti, (2) patipatti, and (3) pativeda. The theoretical or textual aspect of the teachings is known as pariyatti. Theoretical knowledge can be gained through studying the Tripitaka, listening to Dhamma discourses, discussing the Dhamma, and so forth. The practical aspect of the teachings as applied to one’s life is known as patipatti. The realizations and fruits gained through practice of the Dhamma teachings, including nibbāna, are known as pativeda. The theoretical aspect supports and guides the practice of the Dhamma. If we give too much emphasis to the theoretical aspect and neglect the practical part, we will miss the taste of the Dhamma, which is fruitful and beneficial here and now.

In his great teachings, the Buddha always emphasized the practical aspects. The teachings of the Buddha are based on a clear comprehension of the actual state of things. The teachings on the Four Noble Truths deal with the fundamental facts of life, and explain that liberation is attainable through human beings’s own efforts toward purification and insight. The Dhamma is a realistic system of ethics, a penetrative analysis of life, and profound understanding, combined with practical methods for training the mind. In sum, the Buddha’s teachings represent comprehensive and perfect guidelines on the path to liberation. The Buddha said:

You yourselves must strive.
The Buddha’s only point the way.
The meditative ones who tread the path
Are released from the bonds of Mara.

The main theme for the Buddhists is to be able to lead a life full of purpose and usefulness. For them, therefore, the life of awareness (appamada) is the highest and a life of dullness or heedlessness (pamada) is the worst. In other words, a life full of wisdom and compassion like that of Lord Buddha is the kind of life that is most highly valued.

Guidelines for Dhamma Practice

Human life is very precious. We need to utilize this life in the proper way. We need to follow the
Dhamma, which is proper, wholesome, and leads to happiness. We need to avoid actions that are unlawful, unwholesome, or impure, and which bring unhappiness in this life and in future lives:

Lead a righteous life. Lead not a base life.
The righteous live happily both in the world and the next.4

The true Dhamma is that which supports, holds, and guides us. The Dhamma protects those who practice the Dhamma. The Dhamma protect us from falling into the four woeful states of rebirth (apaya): the hells (niraya), the animal kingdom (tiracchana), the realm of the hungry ghosts (peta), and the demons (asura). As the Dhammapada says:

Abstain from all evil (unwholesome deeds),
Do all good deeds (wholesome deeds),
Purify the mind.
These are the teachings of the Buddha.

Of all the paths the Eightfold Path is the best.
Of all things, passionlessness is the best.
Of human beings, the All-seeing One (The Buddha) is the best.5

The Simple Way to Practice Dhamma in Everyday Life

There is no doubt that the Buddhadhama occupies an exalted place in the life of a true Buddhist. A person who practices in accordance with teachings can be called a Buddhist. For Buddhists, it is a very admirable habit to rise early in the morning to spend time in the shrine room before an image of the Buddha. A very good way to begin the day is to take refuge in the Three Jewels, observe the five precepts (to refrain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants), read Dhamma books, and practice meditation before starting the day’s work.

The true Buddhist should mindfully start the day with noble thoughts of the Dhamma and determine to spend the day virtuously. Such a person does not become aggressive and practices pure ethics, pure thinking, and pure living. Gender discrimination between men and women, superstitious beliefs and practices, and blind faith are not the correct Buddhist way. An attitude of patience, compassion, and forgiveness is integral to Buddhist practice. Such practice helps to create an equitable society where there is no discrimination in terms of gender, caste, class, or wealth.

Buddhists must always try to radiate mettā (loving kindness) and good will toward all beings. They realize that, if they spend their time in this way, they will not feel tired even after a long, hard day. Instead, whether resting or moving, they will feel fresh, calm, and serene, having successfully handled their work. Keeping these values in mind, they will be able to work energetically.

Meditation is an effective antidote to the stresses and strains of the modern world in which people are beset with numerous economic, social, political, and cultural problems. Buddhists should reserve some time each day for meditation. Meditation will have a tremendously beneficial influence on those who practice regularly. Even when we tire of activities such as walking, reading, writing, or working, we can turn to meditation to regain mental calm, peace, and joy. Buddhists who meditate frequently are aware of the transitory nature of all things around them and can keep their mental balance when faced with the eight worldly conditions (vicissitudes of life): gain and loss, fame and defame, praise and blame, happiness and pain.
Nowadays, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists spend a great deal of their leisure time engaging in idle gossip and other anti-social habits, such as consuming liquor, going to clubs, and wasting time in unwholesome pursuits. This is harmful to both the progress of the individual and the progress of society. Buddhists should not waste their time, but should generate thoughts of good will and joy and take special care to have a calming effect on the environment in which they live.

Another important practice for Buddhists is to send young children, both boys and girls, to systematically organized Dharma classes in the temples. Children and young people should all be trained to participate in Dhamma activities. Young children should be nurtured in the good traditions of the Buddhadhamma. In the home, both boys and girls should be given equal opportunities to develop their capacities. A home where parents and elders are truly religious sets a noble example for the children. A home that is built on a solid religious foundation will be a happy home.

In celebrating family and social festivals, Buddhists should remember to conduct themselves according to the Buddhist principles. They should behave in a dignified manner in keeping with the cultural and religious Buddhist principles, such as refraining from intoxicants. When organizing religious and holiday celebrations, it is important for Buddhists to take care not to cause any nuisance to others. It is good Buddhist practice to refrain from erecting expensive pavilions and other decorations during religious festivals. Instead, financial resources can be donated to religious or charitable organizations that can use them meaningfully.

Everyone is aware that giving (dāna) is the foundation of Buddhist practice. Among the ways to practice dāna, the giving of Dhamma (dhamma dāna) is preeminent and increasingly appreciated. Buddhists should encourage the giving of dhamma dāna. Buddhist culture should focus on the development of moral character, concentration, awareness, wisdom, and other qualities through meditation. The Noble Eightfold Path is the best way to eradicate the defilements of our minds. Through these practices of mental cultivation, we can live peacefully.

Conclusion

Dhamma should be practiced properly in everyday life and should be given utmost importance in our daily activities. Morality (sīla), concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (pañña), or insight, are the cardinal teachings. When fully cultivated, these teachings raise human beings from lower to higher levels of mental awareness and lead us from darkness to light, from dispassion to passion, and from turmoil to tranquility. In this way, our lives will become more meaningful and we will achieve happiness for ourselves and others. If we apply the Dhamma in our everyday life, we can create an integrated society, which will be a solace to the entire world, creating happiness and harmony for all living beings.

NOTES

Food of Dharma: Rituals at Meals and in the Kitchen
A Case Study of Dongein Imperial Nunnery of Japan

Shobha Rani Dash

It is well known that Sujata offered milk-rice to the skeleton-like Gotama Siddhārtha and, after partaking of that food, Siddhārtha became the Buddha, the enlightened one. Thus, food and women are closely related from this early time and have contributed to the Buddhist faith in special ways even prior to its formal establishment. The Buddha chose the middle path between the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and self-mortification. In both extremes, as well as in the Middle Path, food always plays an important role.

This article discusses the food ceremony that takes place at New Year at Dongein Imperial Nunnery in Kyoto, Japan. Dongein, also known as Donke-in, is an imperial Buddhist convent of the Rinzai Zen sect founded by Zen Abbess Chisen, the grand-daughter of Emperor Juntoku (1210-1221 CE). The Eleven-headed Ávalokitesvara is worshipped as the principal deity here. In addition, some native deities like Toshitokujin sama, Ochinju sama, Oinari sama, Kamigami sama and Benten sama have also been worshipped here since early times. At the entrance to the convent a deity called Ikemitsu Benzaiten is worshipped. Hatsune Inari Daimy-jin sama is worshiped in the storehouse. Earlier, this deity was housed in a shrine called Hatsune no mori, but since the shrine was burnt during the revolt of Ganji, this deity was moved to the Dongein convent and renamed Hatsune Inari Daimy-jin sama. Toshitokujin is the deity of lucky directions, so his altar is changed every year facing the lucky direction of that particular year.

There is also a kitchen deity called Sanbo Daikojin who worshipped in the Dongein convent kitchen. It is a common belief that this deity protects the kitchen, but according to Buddhist belief, this deity protects Buddhist temples and monasteries and the Dharma. Behind the kitchen where waste water drains, a deity called Dokojin sama is worshipped. He is believed to purify the soiled area. As this area in Dongein is very important, this deity is worshipped with nine incense sticks at New Year time. It is really a very rare example of this practice in Japan. Seven small idols of Hotei sama are worshipped together also. Hotei sama is generally viewed as a god of wealth. It is very difficult to say when and how this worship of Hotei sama started in Dongein.

In Japan, the native gods (kami) and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have been worshiped side by side without any inhibition since the earliest days of the introduction of Buddhism in Japan. The rituals at Dongein Imperial Nunnery are an ideal example of this congenial arrangement.

Dongein is the only Buddhist convent in Japan that has been performing a complete and a systematic New Year food offering ceremony to the deities since the date of its founding. The New Year starts with the drinking of a sort of tea called obukuchu. It means “tea for a great good fortune or great bliss.” A sort of pickled plum called umeboshi and knotted konbu kelp called musubi konbu are put inside this tea. This knotted konbu kelp is to tie up one’s life with auspicious things.

The residents of Dongein get up quite early in the morning to make the arrangements. When the arrangements are finished, the worship and offerings to the deities start. First, a set of auspicious foods
known as *kagami mochi*, round mirror-shaped rice cakes, are offered. This set includes *mochi*, *mikan* (a sort of Japanese tangerine), dried *konbu* kelp, and dried persimmon, all laid on fern leaves called *urajiro* and *yuzuriba*. This set of offerings is quite popular in Japan as a part of the New Year celebration and can even be found in the houses of laymen.

Following the offering of *kagami mochi*, the prayer offering ceremony known as *shukushin* is performed. After that three volumes of the *Avalokitesvara Sūtra* or *Kannon Sūtra* are chanted. During this time, some cooked foods called *oryo*, prepared especially for the New Year celebration, are offered. The main dish here is called *ozoni*. It is a white *miso* soup containing baked bean curd, taro, *mochi*, radish, knotted *konbu* kelp and dried gourd shavings. With this soup, sweet soybeans, pickled radish, and burdock with spicy sesame dressing are served, too. Years back, first the cooked food offering ceremony (*oryo*) was performed and then the *séttras* were chanted afterwards. But these days, the foods and the prayers are offered together.

When this celebration is over, another set of food called *oryogu* is offered. It includes rice with red beans, bean curd that is baked and coated with *miso*, carrot, *konnyaku* and other items boiled in soy sauce, a sweet and sour salad of radish and carrot, etc. Then, the bean-jam-filled wafers called *monaka* are offered and the New Year food offering ceremony is completed.

Seventy sets of these foods are prepared and offered. First, the native deities are served, and then, the principal deity Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. When the ceremony is over, all these offered foods are eaten by the resident nuns, their associates and the visitors of that day. They call it *osuberi* (foods earlier used as offerings). These foods must be eaten completely on New Year’s day. Dongein also performs such rituals of seasonal traditional foods during the Summer Bon festival.

It should be noted here that at the New Year ceremony at Dongein, unlike most of the Buddhist temples in Japan, ready-made foods are not offered to the deities. Rather, all the food items are prepared by the nuns themselves and their associates. All the dishes are vegetarian as a token of respect for the Buddhist teaching of non-killing, although this distinction is not observed widely in Japanese Buddhist temples and monasteries. Further, all the dishes at Dongein are seasonal and each one has its own meaning, based on the convent tradition.

Although it somewhat resembles the traditional New Year celebration among the general populace in Japan, Dongein has convent specialties over and above the general New Year traditional foods in Japan. For example, as a part of the New Year celebration, the Japanese eat small fishes known as *gomame*, but Dongein prepares its food carefully based on strict principles of vegetarian dishes only. Even for the basic soup stock known as *dashi*, which usually contains some dried fish in Japanese cooking, fish is not used at all. Instead, *konbu* kelp, radish, *shii**take** mushrooms, and other vegetables are used as soup stock.

The chief abbess, Kano Kobun, observes that the food offering ceremony is not undertaken as a performance to show people, nor for some sort of self-satisfaction on the part of the nuns. Rather, they perform it to share their feelings of joy for the New Year with the deities, because the deities, too, are resident members of the nunnery. In short nuns and deities are sharing the traditional New Year food together. Thus, the nuns make great efforts to combine the practice of Buddhist rituals and the preservation of the convent traditions. In this way, Dongein makes a remarkable social contribution to Japanese culture and to Japanese society.

The details of this case study are based on the performance of the New Year ceremony for this year 2004, as well as an interview with the abess and another nun, and some convent documents.

**GLOSSARY**

*adzuki*: a sweet soybean  
*Benten sama*: name of a native deity  
*Chisen Zenshi*: Zen Abbess Chisen
**dashi:** the basic soup stock used in Japanese food  
**Dokojin sama:** name of a native deity  
**Dongei/Donkein Ama Monzeki:** Dongein Imperial Nunnery  
**Eho:** lucky directions  
**Ganji no ran:** The Revolt of Ganji  
**Gokito:** a prayer offering ceremony  
**Gomame:** name of a kind of small fish  
**Hatsune no mori:** name of a shrine  
**Hatsune Inari Daimyojin sama:** name of a native deity  
**Bosi gaki:** dried persimmon  
**Hotei sama:** a god with a potbelly who is one of the Seven Gods of Good Luck.  
**Ikemitsu Benzaiten:** name of a native deity  
**Juichimen Kanzeon Bosatsu:** Eleven-headed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva  
**Juntoku Tenno:** Emperor Juntoku  
**Kagami mochi:** round mirror-shaped rice cakes offered to a deity  
**Kami:** the native gods of Japan  
**Kamigami sama:** name of a native deity  
**Kannon kyo:** Avalokiteśvara Sūtra  
**Kano Kobun:** name of the chief Abbess of Dongein  
**Kanpyo:** dried gourd shavings  
**Konbu:** kelp, tangleweed  
**Monaka:** bean jam filled wafers  
**Musubi konbu:** knotted kelp  
**Obuku cha:** tea for great good fortune or great bliss  
**Ochinju sama:** name of a native deity  
**Oinari sama:** name of a native deity  
**Omochi:** rice cake made from glutinous rice  
**Onishime:** different vegetables stewed in soy sauce.  
**Oryo:** a set of cooked foods at Dongein.  
**Oryogu:** a set of cooked foods  
**Osuberi:** a term used in Dongein for the foods already offered to the deities  
**Ozoni:** a kind of soup made from white soybean paste  
**Sanbo Daikojin:** name of native deity worshipped in the kitchen  
**Sato imo:** a type of taro  
**Sekihan:** (glutinous) rice boiled with red beans  
**Shitake:** a shiitake mushroom  
**Shojin ryori:** a vegetarian diet, dish, or meal  
**Shukushin:** name of the prayer offering ceremony at Dongein  
**Tofu dengaku:** bean curd baked and coated with soybean paste  
**Toshitokujin sama:** name of a native deity  
**Umeboshi:** a pickled plum  
**Urajiro:** a kind of fern leaf  
**Yaki tofu:** baked bean curd  
**Yuzuriba:** a kind of leaf
NOTES


4. Soybean paste.

Healing Buddhist Women: Ritual, Interrelatedness, and the Core of Buddhist Healing

Paula Kane Robinson Arai

The fact that healing is central to the Buddhist path is attested to by the medical analogy of the Four Noble Truths – diagnosis, cause, prognosis, and treatment. The ultimate healing is the cessation of suffering. The assumption is that we are born with a longing for good things to be permanent and that we seek the fulfillment of our desires. This is the primary condition from which we must be healed. Therefore, healing involves the transformation of habitually deluded ways of looking at the world through the lenses of desire and aversion. The treatment is to experience interrelatedness. The difficulty lies in the task of realizing profound interrelatedness in the midst of conflict, misunderstanding, and loneliness.

Rituals can foster an experience of interrelatedness. Through such experiences of the non-bifurcated body-mind, rituals can help to facilitate healing. They can show us how to be healers, even as we heal from our delusions that falsely divide and unnecessarily discourage. The experience of interrelatedness is the core of the Buddhist mode of healing. When fully connected, healing occurs in each act of compassion, every expression of gratitude.

In seeking insight into the nature of Japanese Zen Buddhist women’s lay practice, my ethnographic research reveals important ways that their sundry practices offer guidance. It also demonstrates the complexity of their lived tradition. When investigating the practices that are most meaningful to them, the following questions surface. What is the relationship between doing zazen and offering incense, flowers, and tea to a picture of your mother who died twenty-three years ago? What resources do a tradition that heralds non-dualism provide for responding to a suicidal sister? How can Zen help a woman care for her completely dependent and demented ninety-seven-year-old mother-in-law at home while raising children and attending to her own marriage? What kind of Zen practice is suited for someone given a terminal diagnosis?

Over a span of six years and after hundreds of hours of interacting, conversing, eating, walking, attending rituals, crying, and laughing with twelve Japanese Buddhist women in their fifties and into their eighties, I now see various dimensions and dynamics of their healing process.

Before I explain them, though, I would like to first tell you about my personal initiation into the world of Zen ritual healing. I share this story with you because vulnerability is central to healing. Not only is it when we are vulnerable that we seek healing, but in order to understand healing one needs to be in touch with one’s own vulnerabilities. Knowing one’s vulnerabilities actually is a key to developing power and strength. It is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of our humanity. It opens us up to connecting with each other in our shared concern to minimize and ideally stop suffering. From this motivation I publicly share my deepest sorrow with you. This immersion into the heart of grief may seem abrupt, but these are the raw moments upon which healing rituals thrive.
This work took root on the day that my mother died. That cold, gray December afternoon in Nashville, after months of listening to the whir of the oxygen machine that provided continual relief to my mother, a vacuum of silence filled her bedroom. Even though I had known she would die soon, when I actually stood at the threshold of life and death, I felt like one wrong move would send us off into an abyss of despair. The last several months had been one long fear of wrong moves: too much morphine or not enough, too much talking or not enough, not enough water or too much. But this time no hospice nurse or doctor could advise us. Suddenly all the palliatives that had been the source of comfort seemed harshly out of place. Hands shaking in disbelief, I cleared the bedside table of the vials of aquamarine liquid morphine, anti-nausea salve that was applied behind the ear, and pink star-shaped sponges for removing sticky mucous from the tongue. Then the ultimacy of the moment crashed upon me. How do I assure her safe passage through this perilous transition? Kito Sensei said to call her. The elderly Zen nun had helped my mother and me over the last nine years, freely applying her healing balm of compassion. Thank goodness it was the middle of the night in Japan. Although she devotes long days to ministering others, at 3:45 a.m. she would be at her old wooden temple where she nurtures the bodhi tree seeds she brought back from India. The cordless phone in my hand was a lifeline. I knew in my head that Soto Zen rituals recognize the deceased as a Buddha, but it was Kito Sensei, in her unheated worship hall 10,000 miles away, who guided me through those terrifying, disorienting moments.

Trusting her to know what to do, I followed her instructions on performing the ritual of safely sending a person off on the journey of death. Rushing about, frantic to treat our new Buddha properly, I found the bronze plum blossom incense burner, sandalwood incense sticks reserved for reverencing Buddhas, white candle, and plain wood carved figure of Kannon, Goddess of Compassion, adding some white chrysanthemums I had kept on hand sensing they would soon be needed. The bedside table was transformed into a mortuary altar. It had not been more than ten minutes since my mother breathed her last. As I offered a stick of incense in honor of her, I saw that her face had relaxed into the peaceful smile that I have seen so often on images of Buddhas. Our relationship was transforming before my very eyes. Are you my mother? When I placed the incense into the burner, I became one with all who had done so before. In the moment that had threatened to be the loneliest in my life, I experienced, instead, a profound connection with all grievers from the distant past and into the endless future. I was not alone. I was united with everyone who has lost a loved one. Kito Sensei had guided us safely through this critical transition with a wisdom that transcended barriers of space, time, life, and death. At that moment my understanding of ritual’s power to heal became a visceral reality.

After that experience, I wanted to learn what other rituals and paths of healing women like my mother practiced. So, I went to Japan and asked the abbess of Aichi Senmon Nisodo, Aoyama Shundo Roshi, if she would let me join her monthly laywomen’s practice during tea time to enquire if any of the women would share their stories with me. With her encouraging support, several women came forward and we began our odyssey into healing rituals with the story I recounted above. Telling that story to the women made me vulnerable in their eyes, inspiring them to share their similarly intimate experiences with me. I had to become vulnerable to them, not just out of respect and fairness, but because it was the only way to enter into the realm of healing. My research reveals that Zen rituals offer ways to address the non-cognitive, non-intellectual, emotional, and psychological needs people have to cope with the challenges of human existence – love, loss, birth and death, longing for belonging. Through their stories of how they responded to the challenges and losses in their lives, I began to see the contours of their healing process. I call it “The Way of Healing,” invoking the concept of “path” that involves polishing the heart by means of discipline and respect and bringing out the heart’s beauty.

This “Way of Healing” is an art form. It is an art to seek out ways to heal and not suffer. More specifically, it is an art of choosing to be grateful in the face of fear-driven and torment-ridden possibilities. This way of living and interpreting the world, self, events, and others requires practice and discipline. It is a path that is
cleared with prayers and paved in tears. This path emerged from in-depth consultation with twelve Japanese Buddhist women. It is more an orientation to living than a clearly delineated and consciously followed course. There are guidelines, but there are no absolutes. It is mostly in hindsight that one can see that there have been consistent values, attitudes, and activities that when taken as a whole constitute a path.

The ten aspects that constitute “The Way of Healing” are: (1) experiencing interrelatedness, (2) embodying a non-dualistic self (body/mind as one), (3) engaging in rituals, (4) nurturing the self, (5) enjoying life, (6) creating beauty, (7) cultivating gratitude, (8) developing an accepting heart, (9) changing perspective, and (10) living compassion. Through assessing this healing process, it becomes clear that experiencing interrelatedness is the key that unlocks all other elements. Once this occurs, all factors mutually amplify each other, resulting in heightened experiences of healing and transformation.

Implicit in the definition of healing that functions among the women is the antithesis of healing: a desperate sense of loneliness where excruciating anguish is accompanied by paralytic fear and an insatiable desire for things that cannot be. Healing, then, is a sense of peace that does not shatter in the face of horrific events and delusional activities. The women live with an awareness that they belong to an all-encompassing network in which compassionate support is both given and received. Their healing derives from seeing themselves as interrelated to everything in the universe.

One of the women described herself as part of a span of five billion years into the past and future. When she sees herself in this way, she can be healed. She adds, “Just being aware of this is healing. If you think this way, death is not a big deal. I don’t feel fear. You received your form from others and then it goes to others. You don’t disappear. This is the flow of life.” Another woman phrased her sense of interrelatedness with a pithy but compelling image: “People are the cells of the universe.” Implicit in this view is the understanding that she belongs and that she is an integral part of something great. Experiencing this interrelatedness is the core of their healing process.

Of course, the interrelatedness here refers to the Buddhist teaching that everything is interrelated. In order to experience the universe this way, focus on desire, hatred, and fear must be averted. The attachments that derive out of these foci obscure the interrelationships, invariably resulting in suffering. Their healing process is a process that loosens the grip these attachments have by fostering an experience of interrelatedness. The following aspects of their healing process explain what and how these women foster such an experience.

The root focus of this worldview is the here and now. That is where value is placed. The mind cannot cut carrots and put them in the pot all by itself, no matter the level of concentration. The body must move. And the body can only move in the present. If this is the case for something relatively inconsequential as getting carrots in the soup, how much more so for things as important as attaining one’s goals in life. They can only be attained in the present moment. This line of thinking is implicit in the women’s worldviews. Healing, likewise, can only occur in the present.

This approach is known as katakara haeru, or entering through form. As the body learns to behave in specific ways, the mind also moves in that direction. Once the body has learned to cut carrots without wasting, that is just the way one cuts carrots. One does not need to think, “I should treat this carrot like a Buddha.” Rather, one treats a carrot as a Buddha each time one fully uses it.

From this perspective, even sickness is a Buddha. It must be related to as such. In other words, what is here now is what must be lived with. One cannot live later and one cannot force life to be a certain way. This healing path is based in a holistic worldview where sickness is part of the world. The women stressed that they must relate to sickness as an active part of their lives, in Japanese tsukiau.

In contrast, a dualistic worldview sets up an adversarial dynamic between health and sickness where sickness is something to be attacked. It is an object apart from oneself. From this perspective, sickness can be construed to be an enemy. On the contrary, from a non-dualistic view one can experience sickness as something with which one is in relationship, not something one wishes to defeat, destroy, or conquer. How one relates to the sickness makes all the difference.
If one is unkind to the sickness, things often get worse. To *tsukiau* or relate well with a sickness, however, does not imply that the sickness will go away. Indeed, one must *tsukiau* with a terminal diagnosis. The question is: Will the relationship be open to inevitable changes or will hostility and bitterness reign? A good way to *tsukiau* or relate would involve acceptance without resentment and peace in the face of demise. Although only one of the consultants has had to face a terminal diagnosis, several have had to learn how to live with chronic ailments. All of them hold that having a peaceful relationship with one’s condition is the ideal. Most have experienced such peace through “The Way of Healing” where the journey is the path.

Rituals are a way of cultivating the heart needed to *tsukiau* or relate with illness in a healing mode. A key to being healed is to experience interrelatedness even to illness. This is not easy. These women have found that various rituals facilitate the changes in perspective needed to experience the fact that they are already embraced by the universe. Rituals are effective in cultivating such awareness, because they involve the body. The mind alone can comprehend interrelatedness, but this knowledge does not bring about healing. A visceral experience of interrelatedness is required for the healing to occur. These women have found that some rituals are especially effective in facilitating such an experience. I should quickly add, though, the women are not necessarily cognizant of this process. They experience the results, but they do not do the rituals in order to experience interrelatedness. They do the rituals in order to do things like remember deceased loved ones or to mark the changes of the seasons. That is the power of rituals. They accomplish some things that are not intentionally sought after, but are wanted. Some things that are helpful are elusive when sought after directly. By its infinitely expansive nature, experiencing interrelatedness is a target that dissolves in the mere effort to aim at it. Through certain rituals, however, it is possible. Rituals affect the body, even if the mind is not conscious of what is going on. That’s the key to their healing power.

Rituals shape, stretch, define, and re-define the identity of its participants. As one engages in a ritual, one’s consciousness changes. The power of ritual is not in an ability to communicate conscious knowledge, but to frame experience in such a way that it may be apprehended meaningfully. Ritual can have the impact of lived experience because it is performed by the body. In this way people can learn about what is important through experiencing “fresh” what those before one have experienced. Real life is very messy and organic whereas discourse about life tends to be tidier and more linear. Ritual is in-between. Being in a ritual with a long tradition can make a person feel that they are connected and belong. A ritual can affirm a person for who they are.

Rituals work through the senses to cultivate wisdom in the bones. Unlike discourses on wisdom that focus on understanding the empty nature of ultimate reality – and hence are sometimes too abstract and cold to comfort someone who is experiencing excruciating pain – rituals can help one feel the connectedness bodily. The typical Buddhist ritual done at home and temple altars engages all the senses. Lighting a candle provides a glow for the eyes and heat for the body. Lighting a stick of incense provides an aroma for the nose. Ringing a bell provides sound for the ear. Chanting reverberates in the body. Food offerings made will later be eaten and stir the tongue and fill the body. These typical ritual acts affirm the gift of life in concrete ways experienced by the body. It is in this way that rituals make symbols real. People can really experience certain feelings that shift one’s view of life through the guidance of rituals. For example, it is not just a matter of intellectually knowing that by virtue of DNA you are still connected to your parents after they die. A ritual that welcomes parents home can make someone feel that they are enjoying a meal together. In addition to specific rituals, ritualizing daily activities is part of the healing process of these women, that is, if an experience of interrelatedness is remembered in the body. Many renew this experience each morning at their home altars. Then chores like cleaning and cooking become ritualized as they are imbued with meaning. This accomplishes many things, including care for self and others in the household, if there are any. Nurturing the self is a critical component of the process on two different planes. First, it is essential on a mundane level, because no matter what happens, you still need to eat, brush your teeth and bathe, clean your surroundings, launder clothes, and take out the trash. Second, skills that nurture the self affirm
personal competence in the face of uncontrollable circumstances. When we brush our teeth, we not only get our clean teeth, but also get a sense of personal competence. This is self-affirming. Rarely is brushing one’s teeth or other basic tasks of daily life an intense experience of nurturing the self, but when healing is acutely needed, they can be. Those who have experienced debilitating suffering know the healing power of ritualized acts of self care.

Sometimes getting through a difficult situation is a matter of living with pain and loneliness, and having things to do that make a positive difference can make the time seem less intensely painful. If one did not have skills for nurturing the self, then the pain can become intractable. From my consultants’ perspective, taking care of basic needs like shelter and food is a source of satisfaction. They do not interpret it as inferior work. Indeed, those very skills fair them well when they need to live with tragedy.

Another aspect of nurturing the self that is critical for the healing process is the sense of responsibility for one’s own life. These women see that they are responsible for their own lives. They do not blame others for their problems. Rather than focusing on what others have done, they focus on what they can do to address a situation. They also do not place conditions on their happiness. They do not take the attitude that they will be happy if ______ (fill in the blank) happens. What they can do is choose how they will act. To maintain this perspective requires discipline, the discipline to not lose sight of the support one receives from the universe and to not lose sight of the power one has to experience and interpret events. Patience and disciplining the mind are part of nurturing the self. Without them, one cannot see the larger picture nor can one help anyone else. Disciplining the mind to focus on the largest context is essential for changing perspective.

Another aspect of the healing process is enjoying life. It is a skill that the women said has become increasingly important, at least they have recognized its value as they have matured. Finding the humor in a situation is part of the process of transformation where a different set of symbols is found that enables one to accommodate the painful reality of loss, injury, or trauma. They said that finding joy in the subtle things in daily life is most important. What they mean by enjoying life is not about seeking out methods of being entertained. It is about realizing a supple and flexible body-mind. If you have this, then you can enjoy life without setting conditions upon what is needed to experience joy. Being able to adjust one’s perspective to see and enjoy the beauty in what is, is an essential aspect of their healing process.

Whether one is creating beauty by composing a poem or arranging flowers, or one is just enjoying a walk to see the plum blossoms in bloom, the power of beauty can help one transform and heal by refocusing one’s perspective. The power seems to lie in the experience of receiving the energy of the beauty. When beleaguered by tragedy and loss, the in-coming energy is usually very heavy. Taking in the energy of the beauty shifts the focus of one’s attention to the beauty, so one is filled by the beauty, too. This can instill hope, lengthen one’s endurance to live with loss, and revitalize someone who is in the midst of tragedy. Beauty can also be a catalyst for healing. Or, it can also be a mark that healing has occurred.

When one sees or creates beauty, my collaborators observed that it is not a strain to see what enormous support one receives from the universe. The fact that one is alive is proof that the universe embraces one. When one feels lonely, this awareness can sometimes make one feel connected and cared for. The type of gratitude these women find especially healing is not construed as me being grateful for things, because that sets up a dualism, which is incongruous with an interrelated worldview. If one is aware that one is already – without having to do anything special – an integral part of the world that is in a vast web of give and take, mutually influential, gratitude is a natural response.

When grateful, one does not have to work at seeing the good things in a situation, they just appear. Also, when in a grateful state of being, one does not need to work at not complaining. It is not a state of resisting, restraining, or repressing ones negative thoughts and feelings. They just do not arise when one is experiencing gratitude. Gratitude is, in a sense, a short cut to healing.
Part of cultivating gratitude involves developing an accepting heart. Without an accepting heart, indeed, there can be no healing. Not rejecting anything is fundamental to the healing process, because there are no conditions on healing. Receiving everything that occurs in one’s life, however, is extraordinarily hard. Several collaborators said that if one actually accepted everything, one would be a Buddha. One woman said that to accept everything is the final and highest form of humanity. You complete life when you can do this. The image that guides her is an image of a woman simply in (gassho) (anjali). She receives all without judging and without anguish. This is the image of Kannon (the Bodhisattva of Compassion). Kannon’s heart accepts everything. She considers being able to accept everything with gassho (peace, joy and gratitude in heart) the human ideal. It is her goal in life. It is a critical facet of the healing process.

Although the details vary, they all indicated that in order to cultivate gratitude and develop an accepting heart, transforming their perspective was critical. It requires learning from whatever happens and seeking what goodness, wisdom, or strength can be gained, especially from physical or psychological suffering. To do this requires focusing on the larger picture. The fundamental assumption is that they are not living independent lives based solely upon their own power and effort. They see that they are alive because the myriad interconnections in the universe work together to generate and support life. Some say this is due to the Buddhadharma (Buppo). Others explain it as the work of the Buddha. Yet others explain it in more scientific and ecological terms. Whatever the metaphor used to explain, this perspective of their lives seems to naturally give rise to a profound sense of gratitude for all things. Ever adjusting one’s perspective with the vicissitudes of life enables one to accept one’s life into one’s heart, to feel grateful for and create beauty out of what is. To do this is to embody compassion. Embodying compassion is the ultimate healing.

Even the deceptively simple act of listening is an embodiment of compassion. Many of the women stressed how the healing power of active listening is profound. It is a basic form of compassion. Several women explicitly stressed that Kannon-sama, the embodiment of compassion, is called the “One who hears the cries of the world.” What happens when one is listened to is that one experiences not being alone. If one is understood, then it is confirmation that one is connected. It is proof that someone cares. It is not so much the act of speaking and pouring out one’s problems that does the healing. One woman stressed that in order to be a good listener one needs to have a receptive heart. And in order to have a receptive heart, one needs to be open to various perspectives. To be a good listener is to be a healer. To be listened to is to be healed.

Compassion figures in these women’s healing process both as a source of healing and as an expression of healing. By their definition of healing, one who is healed is one who is compassionate. Compassion is the alpha and the omega of the healing process. In other words, to be healed one must be a healer.

Researching the rituals that transform and facilitate the physical and spiritual healing of contemporary Japanese women led to their wealth of wisdom, strength, humor, and beauty. These virtuous qualities were mostly cultivated through painful, difficult, and challenging experiences. Through understanding their efforts to find relief from suffering, it becomes evident that the healing power of Buddhist rituals lies in their capacity to provide people with a conduit for experiencing interrelatedness, the lynchpin of their healing process. Healing is a worldview, a way of living and facing all kinds of challenges of the non-bifurcated body and mind. Therefore, for these women, all of life is a process of healing or transformation of the way life is viewed and experienced.

We are all healers and we all need healing. The ultimate healing is the cessation of suffering, which happens when we embody compassion. Healing begins with experiencing our interrelatedness. We are each a glistening facet in Indra’s Jewel Net, filled with each of our distinctive qualities that extend across much of the earth’s geography and manifest the results of eons of impermanence. The vast web of Indra’s Jewel Net is dynamic and always changing. There is something new every instant. We all know this, but our senses often deceive us if we are not careful. It is so easy to not experience our interrelatedness, because when I stub my toe, the nerves in your toe do not send messages to your brain registering my specific physical pain. But when we are aware of our interrelatedness, compassion pours in. Compassion does
not come from an intellectual understanding of interrelatedness, it comes from experiencing ourselves as integral to the whole. When we experience our wholeness, the natural response is gratitude. Gratitude opens the heart wide so that light can shine brightly onto our interrelatedness, making it clear what compassionate activity is appropriate for the moment.

This is the key to healing our loneliness. A sense of loneliness divides us. Loneliness is based on a delusion. It is a false view of the world, because no one is alone. We are all interrelated. However, it is not hard to experience feeling alone, because our senses reinforce this notion. This root cause of suffering can be healed through meditations and rituals that facilitate the experience of interrelatedness.

The Third Noble Truth states, there is cessation of suffering. I used to see this as the least significant of the Noble Truths. That was before my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. After that, I realized the prognosis “there is a cure” is the source of profound gratitude. Our reality today may not include more suffering than previously in history, but today we have access to information about suffering on a global scale. So, our experience of the brokenness of the world is intense. Everyday we face wars, lies, and structural injustices that generate violence and destruction on our fellow humanity and our planet. It is helpful to remember that it does not have to be this way. It is empowering to recognize that each of us has the capacity to heal from delusions that fuel suffering. This, in and of itself, is something for which to be deeply grateful. From a grateful heart flows a flexibility of response that is based on an honesty about the big picture, that is, a view of how each event, person, or thing is ultimately part of the whole that embraces each of us. The view is not necessarily cerebrally perceived, nor is the response based on an active cognition of all the dynamics of a situation. That is one of the main characteristics of the power of gratitude. It is a response to the world that comes from a healing heart.
Meditation Practices
Samatha and Vipassanā Meditation in the Theravāda Tradition

Iljung Sunim

In the Anguttara Nikāya (AN) of the Pāli canon there is a discourse known as the *Roga (Disease) Sutta*. Here the Buddha gives a surprising statement about the mental health of human beings:

Monks, there are beings who can achieve freedom from the sufferings of physical illness for one year, for two years, three, ... ten, twenty, ... fifty, ... for even 100 years. But monks, except for arahats, it is hard to find beings in the world who can achieve freedom from mental illness for even a moment.¹

The Buddha sees all human beings, except for arahats, as patients suffering from ignorance, mental defilements, and hindrances. Today, in the 21st century, physical illnesses (*kāyika roga*) can be cured by various medicines and medical treatments, but how can mental illnesses (*cetasika roga*) be cured? What is the prescription given by the Buddha to free human beings from the sufferings of mental illness? According to the Pāli *suttas*, the remedy is the medicine of meditation. Buddhist meditation (*bhāvanā*) is a kind of mental therapy to purify the mind by removing defilements and suffering. This is the principle of the Four Noble Truths (*cattaro ariya saccā*).

What, then, is the practical system and method presented by the Buddha? Which meditations can liberate human beings from inner and outer cravings and entanglements? In the *Jāta Sutta* in the *Devatasamyutta* of the Samyutta Nikāya (SN), the Buddha gives this answer:

A man established in virtue, wise,
Who has developed the mind and wisdom,
A *bhikkhu* ardent and discreet:
Such a person can untangle this tangle.²

This stanza, quoted by Buddhagosa in the first sentence of the *Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification)*, clearly shows the practical system of early Buddhism, namely, virtue (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). This gradual training (*anupubba-sikkhā*) is based on the Noble Eightfold Path (*atthangiko maggo*) which is proclaimed as the Middle Way (*majjhimā patipadā*) in the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*, the first discourse of the Buddha. What, then, is the final goal of this path and training? That is nibbāna and liberation (*vimutti*). This paper examines two methods of Buddhist meditation, *samatha* and *vipassanā*, based on the Pāli texts of the Theravāda tradition.
Samatha and Vipassanā Meditation in the Pāli Texts

Samatha and vipassanā are technical terms in Buddhist meditation. The Pāli term samatha means calm, tranquility, and serenity. Vipassanā means inward vision, insight, and penetration. These two terms indicate special states and functions of the mind that result from meditation, and the methods and vehicles used to reach such states. Therefore it is said that samatha bhāvanā is “calm meditation” to develop concentration (samādhi) and vipassanā bhāvanā is “insight meditation” to develop wisdom (paññā).

The Dasuttara Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya (DN) asks, “What are the two things to be developed? Samatha and vipassanā.”3 The Samatho Sutta in the SN asks, “What is the path leading to nibbāna? Samatha and vipassanā.”4 These terms rarely occur in the early suttas. However the contents of the whole process of meditation, from the beginning through the fourth jhāna until reaching final liberation, occurs very often in the suttas. The Buddha did not mention clearly which part is samatha and which part is vipassanā, but when the sutta is examined carefully, it can be known. The Bāla-vagga of the AN gives clear definitions for samatha and vipassanā meditation:

Monks, there are two conditions conducive to (attaining) higher knowledge (vijjā). What are these two? Samatha and vipassanā. Monks, if samatha is cultivated, what profit does it attain? The mind is cultivated. What profit results from a cultivated mind? All lust (rāga) is abandoned.

Monks, if vipassanā is cultivated, what profit is attained? Wisdom is cultivated. If wisdom is cultivated, what profit is attained? All ignorance (avijjā) is abandoned.6

From this quotation, it is clear that samatha and vipassanā are two different methods having two different aims and results. It says that samatha is a means of cultivating the mind, which includes both concentration (samādhi) and meditative absorption (jhāna). Samatha abandons all lust (rāga), but not ignorance (avijjā). Why? Because samatha meditation only deals with the level of manifest defilements (pariyutthāna) of the mind, but does not touch the level of latent defilements (anusaya) lying deep in the mind. These latent defilements and ignorance can be dealt with only through vipassanā meditation. Wisdom (paññā) is the remedy for ignorance and only wisdom can uproot the latent tendencies.8 Therefore it is the theory of early Buddhism and the Theravāda tradition that one cannot attain liberation (nibbāna) merely by practicing samatha meditation. Samatha has to be practiced in conjunction with vipassanā meditation to achieve the highest goal. This is the reason why vipassanā meditation is strongly emphasized and why vipassanā should be practiced based on samatha or samādhi.

Samatha and Vipassanā Meditation in the Pāli Commentaries

The Visuddhimagga, the most authentic commentary of Theravāda Buddhism, defines concentration as the “unification of wholesome mind (kusalacittekaggatā samādhi).”9 It presents 40 samatha meditation subjects (kammatthāna) for developing concentration, such as access concentration (upacāra-samādhi) and absorption concentration (appanā-samādhi).10 Through the practice of samatha meditation, the benefits and fruits of samatha are attained: the higher meditative absorptions (four rūpa jhānas and four arūpa jhānas) and higher knowledges (five abhiññā).11 Vipassanā meditation is practiced to penetrate the nature of things as they really are (yathābhūta), namely, impermanence, suffering, and non-self (anicca, dukkha, and anatta). Through vipassanā meditation, if one develops ten kinds of insight knowledge (vipassanā-ñāna), one gradually perfects five kinds of purification of wisdom (paññā-visuddhi), based on the previously accomplished purification of virtue (sīla-visuddhi) and the purification of mind (citta-visuddhi). In this way, one accomplishes the
seven kinds of purification. Attaining full liberation and the four states of a noble being (*ariya puggala*) are the benefits and fruits of *vipassanā* meditation. The commentary explains this topic systematically and profoundly.

**The Relationship between Samatha and Vipassanā Meditation**

To clarify the concepts of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation and the differences between the two, diagrams are useful. The following classification of the main features of each is based on descriptions by modern scholars and meditation masters:

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<td><strong>Subject of meditation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aims of meditation</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Final benefit/fruit</strong></td>
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From these diagrams, it is clear that *samatha* and *vipassanā* have their own aims and roles. However, they are not totally separate and independent. Let us see how they are connected and related to each other.
The Relationship Between Samatha and Vipassanā Meditation

The Samādhi sutta of SN says, “Monks, develop concentration. A monk who is concentrated knows things as they really are.” Concentration is essential for insight. The defiled mind cannot see the nature of mental and physical phenomena. Therefore, concentration becomes the basis and precondition for insight to arise. If samatha meditation has a genuine aim, it is the role of helping and supporting vipassanā meditation. There is a very useful sutta in AN that mentions the relationship between the samatha and vipassanā meditation. A discourse attributed to Ven. Ānanda explains the four categories of the arahant’s attainment. The following quotes are from that sutta:

Herein, your reverences, a monk develops Vipassanā preceded by Samatha. In him thus developing vipassanā preceded by samatha is born the Way (maggo). He follows along that Way, makes it grow, makes much of it. In him following, developing, making much of that Way, the fetters (samyojana) are abandoned, the lurking tendencies (anusaya) come to an end.

Again, your reverence, a monk develops Samatha preceded by Vipassanā. In him.... Again, your reverences, a monk develops Samatha and Vipassanā coupled (yuganaddham). In him ...

These quotations show the inseparable relationship between samatha and vipassanā. They reveal the important fact that these two methods have to be practiced and developed together, regardless of the order. The process of becoming a noble being (ariya puggala) in contrast to an ordinary being is the process of practicing these two meditations based on virtue. Sometimes samatha is practiced first and sometimes vipassanā is practiced first. Sometimes the practice of samatha and vipassanā are coupled (samatha-vipassanā yuganaddham). The commentary on the AN explains that this method is practiced from the first jhāna to the eighth jhāna. The meditator practices samatha in the jhānic states and practices vipassanā in the state of coming out from the jhāna states, because in the jhānic states, one cannot observe or experience conditioned things (sankhārā). Therefore, vipassanā meditation has to be practiced after coming out of the jhānic states.

There are two categories of meditators or arahants based on these two systems, namely samatha-yānika and vipassanā-yānika. The samatha-yānika is a person who has attained arahantship through vipassanā preceded by attaining the four jhānas of samatha meditation. The vipassanā-yānika is a person who has attained arahantship only through vipassanā meditation that depends on momentary concentration (khanika-samādhi) without samatha (fourth jhāna) meditation. There is a new interpretation that the samatha-yānika practices the method of samatha conjoined with vipassanā in conjunction (yuganandham). The vipassanā-yānika practices only vipassanā from the beginning to the final goal, hence they are also called suddha-vipassanā-yānika or sukkha-vipassaka. Here it is not a problem to apply the principle of gradual training, sīla samā (khanika-samādhi) is preconditioned by vipassanā meditation. In the Theravāda tradition today, both traditions, samatha-yānika and vipassanā-yānika, are still followed and continued.

Conclusion

It is said that samatha and vipassanā meditation practices as presented in the Pāli texts are methods to develop concentration (samādhi) and wisdom (paññā). Based on this theoretical framework, I would like to suggest how these two meditations can be applied in daily life.

For samatha meditation, anāpānasati-bhāvanā, or mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out, and mettā-bhāvanā, meditation on loving-kindness, both are good. These two meditation objects both make it
possible to attain the third and fourth jhānas. Even without those attainments, these practices are helpful for developing a certain degree of concentration and purity of mind that is conducive to vipassanā meditation. Therefore practicing vipassanā after developing one of these two preliminary practices is effective. For vipassanā meditation, all the mental and physical phenomena that are experienced in daily life can be used as objects of observation. When talking, I am aware that I am talking. When walking, I am properly aware that I am walking. When anger arises, I am aware that anger is arising in my mind. When experiencing happiness, I am properly aware that I feel happy. Whatever we experience – anytime, anywhere – we have to be mindful and aware at that very moment of the mental and physical phenomena we are experiencing. If we are not properly aware of them, that moment is just a state of ignorance (avijjā).

It is said that our sankhāra, karma, and suffering (dukkha) are not fixed, but are impermanent things. If we practice ardently and sincerely, they are bound to pass away. This is the principle, “All conditioned things are impermanent (sabbe sankhāra aniccā).” Immediately before the Buddha’s parinibbāna, his last words to the bhikkhus were: “Now, monks, I declare to you: sankhāras (all conditioned things) are of the nature of decay. Strive on untiringly.”

NOTES


3.  DN 273: Katame dve dhamm bhāvetabbo? Samatho ca vipassanā ca.

4.  SN 360: Katamo ca abhikkhave asankhatagāmi maggo? Samatho ca vipassanā ca.

5.  Vijjā is usually three kinds (te-vijjā): knowledge of previous existences (pubbenivāsānussati-ñāna), knowledge of the divine eye (dībbacakkhu-ñāna), and knowledge of the destruction of defilements (āsavakkhaya-ñāna).


7.  There are three kinds of lust (rāga): lust for sensual pleasure (kāma rāga), lust for form (rūpa-rāga), and lust for the formless (arūpa-rāga).


9.  Visuddhimagga 84.

10.  Visuddhimagga 110-111. The 40 meditation subjects are: ten kasinā, ten foulnesses (asubba), ten recollections (anussatiyo), four divine abodes (brahmavihārā), four immaterial states (āruppā), one perception (saññā), and one defining (vavattbhāna). See also the Abhidhammattha-sangaha.


The Meaning of Nonduality in the Practice of Compassion

Sookyung Hwang

In today’s society, as exchanges between the different nations and cultures increase, and the concept of globalization grows, there is an unprecedented need to understand and appreciate diverse cultures and ways of thinking, and to cooperate for mutual benefit. Humans, however, in spite of their material development, cause problems of unequal distribution of wealth and environmental pollution. We experience serious alienation and face conflicts caused by discriminating thoughts of otherness. An extreme example is that we are still not free from the threat of violence, terror, and war.

On the other hand, as a means to solve these problems and to seek a new vision of peace and harmony, there is an increased interest in the spiritual dimension. There have been many studies on the principle of mind and meditation as well. Cultivating the compassionate mind is one of the most needed practices for modern people.

One of the important Buddhist teachings – the thought and practice of compassion – is that we should free all beings from suffering and help them attain enlightenment. Buddhist compassion does not mean only the emotional level of understanding others, feeling sorry for them, or wishing them well. True compassion comes from wisdom by which we are able to see things and beings from a right and fundamental point of view. Thus, the Buddhist practice of compassion shows how to create true, loving relationships based on a right awareness of oneself and others. Further, it shows how to pursue global peace and harmony.

The purpose of this article is to examine the views of the Korean Seon (Zen) Master Daehaeng (1926-) on the practice of compassion based on her concept of nonduality. This view understands beings as a basis for cultivating compassion. Speaking from a Seon perspective, she explains nonduality, the practice of compassion through nonduality, and practice in daily life.

Understanding Non-duality and the Principle of Emptiness

Daehaeng Sunim says that everything comes from One Mind, buddhata. The basis is one, but things appear in countless shapes and appearances. Therefore, all beings are one, not two. If the fundamental mind is the root of a tree, all beings are like the leaves and branches of the tree. Hence, others and I are not two, my mind and objects are not two, humans and the natural universe are not two, and the Buddha and sentient beings are not two. All share the same One Mind.1

Daehang Sunim explains that the meaning of no-self is that we have the same mind and body. We live together and are interrelated to everything. The principle of living is not independent, but functions in co-existence, co-consumption, and co-utilization.2

This suggests a basic paradigm shift from dichotomy to nonduality. For example, other religions or teachings say to love others as you love yourself. No matter how truly you love others or even your enemies, however, they are still other beings, not yourself. To love others as you love yourself and to say that others are nothing other than yourself are completely different points of view. In the former, others are just others, but
in the latter, others are you. Furthermore, not only human beings, but also all phenomena, nature, and the universe itself are forms of yourself and their root is the Buddha. All the suffering and conflict we experience is caused when we ignore our interdependence, consider the false ego to be substantial, and pursue self-centered benefits.

**The Principle of Change and Emptiness**

The nature of reality is empty. Daehaeng Sunim defines emptiness to mean “constantly changing and having no stability.” Nothing is ever fixed for a moment. Things change continuously, so it is said that “form is emptiness and emptiness is form.” There is no real substance to which we can attach.

The co-existing mind and body are the empty mind and body as well. But human beings mistakenly regard what is changing and empty as stable and fixed, and cling to it. In her interpretation of the *Heart Sūtra*, Daehaeng Sunim points out: “All sentient beings live intrinsically together as one with my mind and body, using everything together, with the same functions of eating, digesting, and excreting as myself. But, because we are ignorant of the fact, we have to go through all kinds of suffering.”

**The Compassion Practice of Non-duality in Daily Life**

Daehang Sunim says that, according to Non-duality, one should see all things and all beings as oneself. Throughout countless previous lives, there are no beings that we have not been and nothing that we have not done, no matter how good or bad it is. Therefore, all beings are my parents and children.

Thus, it is quite natural to feel compassion when seeing the pain and suffering of others. “I see someone and it is me. I see the pain of somebody, it is mine. Any bug’s life is my own. All are nothing other than myself. Therefore how could compassion not arise from within?” Directly seeing others as oneself requires a very positive change of one’s point of view, including breaking through self-centered consciousness.

For example, Daehang Sunim often says to the people who have been helped by her and want to express their appreciation, “You and I are not separate. I helped you because I was suffering.” Likewise, there cannot be a difference between giver and receiver, helper and the one being helped. “Even when I give to someone in need, I am giving to myself. I do it for myself, not for the other person.” If you and others are the same, there can be no conditions put on compassion.

**All are Intrinsically Buddha: The Bodhisattvas’ Endless Salvation**

When compassion is based on Buddhist truth, one can go further into the basic problems of life, beyond feeling sorry for the pain and suffering of others. The purpose of Buddhist practice is not only to escape from the adversities that confront us or remain in our current situation. As long as we are not conscious of the false I, we cannot avoid the sufferings of life and the endless sufferings of *samsāra*. Thus true compassion means to work together with all beings to recover the true nature of the *buddhata* and free beings from karma forever.

The bodhisattvas’ vow is to liberate of all sentient beings, never dwelling on personal liberation. According to Daehang Sunim, it is impossible to turn away from others, since they are just other forms of yourself. In this regard, everything is my companion on the way to enlightenment, the way to recovering the intrinsic *buddhata*.
The Practice of Compassion in Daily Life

Daehang Sunim puts great emphasis on practice in daily life. She says that there is no Buddhism outside of human life. Thus, we can cultivate compassion through practice in everyday situations. Above all, we think about how we see others and how we treat them. The practice of compassion means not to be deceived by what others temporarily are, but to able to see their true inner mind. We maintain the view that all humans are equal and precious by nature. Keeping this in mind, we can generate a positive attitude even dealing with very difficult people.

In today's society, there are a number of differences among people with respect to physical appearance, personality, profession, finances, race, nationality, gender, religion, and so on. We can check to see if we have any prejudices or fixed opinions about these differences. We should acknowledge people's differences and their right to be unique in their own way, without discrimination. Daehang Sunim says, “The life of all beings is one life, so do not discriminate. Everything exists in One Mind. Love one another and appreciate all beings with compassion. Regard their body as your body and their pain as yours.” Whether at home, work, or in social relationships, the practice of compassion through the principle of nonduality can open the mind and lead to a harmonious life.

Conclusion

It is hard to be compassionate when one has a self-centered ego. Daehang Sunim’s view on compassion suggests that we should see others as ourselves. Such practice of compassion is a way to break down our fixed or one-sided views, broaden our mind, and cultivate the inner strength to achieve loving and kind relationships with all beings. If we are able to see all beings as ourselves, eventually there will be no need for compassion. Unconditional compassion is the mind of the Buddha. A place where people of non-dual consciousness live harmoniously is a Pure Land. With effort, we can see others as equal and act accordingly here and now. We can create a path to a bright and peaceful future – a Buddha Land.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 348.
Is Karunā (Compassion) an Emotion?  
A Comparison of Asian and Western Approaches  

Thea Mohr

For more than 15 years, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been meeting with Western top scientists from various fields – among them psychologists, neurobiologists and philosophers – in order to reflect upon crosscultural implications and overlaps between Buddhism and Science. In 2003, the 11th Mind and Life Conference was held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Questions about what happens in the mind of a meditator in the process of meditation and the effects of extensive meditation practice on the capabilities of the human mind were discussed with great intensity.

Experiments carried out on Buddhist monks and other persons well versed in meditation can form the starting point of investigating this field. The crucial question is: What can be achieved by the brain once the mind is trained? In his high tech laboratories Professor Ron Davidson, a neurobiologist at University of Wisconsin-Madison, measured brain waves during deep meditation. In most people, in the right forefront of the brain negative emotions like fear and anger are produced, whereas positive feelings are related to the left forefront. Davidson proved that a continuous training through meditation and mindfulness causes a shift of the brain activities from the right to the left half of the brain.

Furthermore, experimentation showed how external events – such as the cry of a baby, traffic noise, or a woman in shock – occurring during the meditation on compassion – had hardly any effect on the mental equilibrium of a meditator, whereas untrained persons immediately tend to react and lose their state of concentration. These results may indicate a correlation between continuous meditation practice, mental calm, and the human immune system.

In addition, the speakers agreed that the mind is continuously busy producing thoughts and images. A well trained meditator can use this activity as an opportunity to consciously produce imagination and visualization for attaining wholesome states of mind. For example, visualizing a meditation object with the qualities of mercy, compassion, helpfulness, and an absence of obstacles gradually helps the mind disengage from worldly and often useless activities. Step by step the practitioner approaches the state of the visualized image by directing the mental faculties in a beneficial direction.

These remarkable results should be taken as background for the following analysis of the crosscultural approaches to the terms “emotion” and “karunā,” or compassion, as considered in Buddhist philosophy and in Western terminology. Two Mind and Life Conferences have dealt with emotions and a third one was dedicated to the subject of compassion. Although the subject is not examined in this paper, still it seems important to point out that the stereotype of the alleged female affinity with emotional expression has not yet been either challenged or critically reviewed in the context of the Mind and Life Conferences.

In this article, I examine Western approaches to emotional states, as seen in some examples from the Hebrew Bible and in Christian theologians’ commentaries. I then compare and contrast these approaches with concepts that are central to a Buddhist understanding of compassion. To cover the range of emotional
expression, some examples from Western literature and music will be presented in comparison with outstanding female Buddhist practitioners whose activities are guided by compassion.

**Compassion in Christianity**

Christianity has strong roots in the Jewish and Greek traditions. In the Greek tragedy “Medea,” Euripides draws the gruesome image of a revenge that was considered fully justified in ancient times. Bitter hatred and brutal cruelty permeate the Hebrew Bible, too. The principle of “an eye for an eye” prevailed until the historical appearance of Jesus of Nazareth. With this appearance, the image of the deity and of humanity is changed in a fundamental way. God helps suffering creatures as a sign of his grace. The direct experience of God's divine compassion, pity, and forgiveness can be traced in the book of Psalms in the Hebrew Bible and, particularly, in the New Testament.

In Christian understanding, compassion is one of God's essential characteristics. God's perfection is infinite and His holy and just nature excludes any cruelty and unjust harshness. Compassion toward a sinful person who truly deserves God’s judgment is a behavior that can only be understood in terms of a merciful God. God’s compassion manifests itself in his general wish for humanity’s salvation, his redemptive act of accepting the world, the incarnation and glorification of his son, the justification of the individual, and the completion of the world.

In Christianity, the love of God and his compassion define each other. They come into the world by means of the word of God that has become flesh and blood in his son Jesus Christ. God’s compassion cannot be calculated. Its diversity, manner, condition, and distribution are expressions of God’s sovereign will. Therefore, it cannot be combined with other divine virtues like justice and leniency to a predictable axiom that puts God’s ways into the hands of humankind.

Damnation and evil in the world – the question of the theodicy – ultimately point to the mystery of the holy God’s sovereign liberty and to its revelation at the end of time. Wherever God acts compassionately and mercifully, compassion does not dissolve God’s justice, but results in an abundance of justice that lets God be just towards human beings whom He created just.

God's compassion provides the basis, prerequisite, and impetus for human compassion. Thus, human compassion is a responding compassion, something passed on that was received before – passed on, not by free will, but by an obligation born of the compassion received from God.

In recognizing and developing empathy for the poverty and misery of others, compassion recognizes its own poverty and misery. This creates a solidarity, because both give and receive from the same abundance. The giver receives more than she gives – the undisclosed aspect of her own emptiness, in which she does not lose her own abundance.

Johann Baptist Metz perceives the challenge of postmodern plurality and crystallizes the core of Christian life. The biblical tradition of evangelism entails the essential element of universality, of universal responsibility. This universality is defined by worldly suffering. Jesus’ first glance was not directed at the other’s sin, but at the other’s suffering. To Jesus, sin was, above all, the denial of participating in the suffering of others; the refusal to think beyond the dark horizon of one’s own suffering or deliverance to the creature's secret narcissism. Following Metz’s point of view, this is where Christianity began: in the wake of Jesus, whose first concern was the suffering of the stranger. Talking about Jesus as the son of God necessarily means to talk about the suffering of strangers and to bemoan responsibility missed, solidarity refused.

It is difficult to find a suitable word for the elementary sensitivity to suffering in the Christian gospel. “Pity” refers too much to the emotional sphere and sounds privatizing; an emotion is not enough to cope with the reality of existence. The terms “empathy” and “sympathy” seem apolitical and asocial. “Compassion” seems to be the key word for a universal Christian program in the age of globalization.
Compassion, the ability to notice the suffering of others, is an indispensable prerequisite and ingredient of all future peace politics, of all new forms of social solidarity in the face of the growing gap between rich and poor, and of all promising dialogue among cultures and religions. Compassion protests against the pragmatism of a freedom that is severed from the history of suffering and has gone morally blind. The recognition of the authority of the sufferers is proclaimed by Jesus. The mysticism of the Bible is, at its heart, a political one: What Jesus sees culminates in a cry, in a co-suffering (compassion), and thereby becomes human.

*Karuṇā in Buddhism*

No doubt all religions deal with the problem of suffering. In Buddhism’s frame of four truths, suffering is an existential precondition, the basic mode of being. The Buddha, however, shows a different way out of suffering: to turn inside (introspection) and transform suffering into a state of happiness.

*Karuṇā*, meaning compassion in Sanskrit, is important in all Buddhist traditions. Considered to be one of the chief attributes of the Buddha. *Karuṇā* it is among the prime motivating factors of Siddhārtha Gautama’s pursuit of enlightenment. In the Theravāda tradition it finds its highest expression as a member of the fourfold Brahmvāhīras or “divine abodes.” It functions in consonance with love (*maitri*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣa*) as an expression of the highest ethical standard of pursuit. In Mahāyāna it achieves its fullest development as one of the driving forces in the bodhisattva’s religious practice. It is generally linked with wisdom (*prajñā*) in describing the two chief attributes of the bodhisattva. *Karuṇā* is said to be embodied in the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who receives much attention in the Chinese and Japanese traditions as well as in the embodiment of Tara in the Tibetan tradition.

During one Mind and Life Conference, Georges Dreyfus, a professor of philosophy, asked, “Is Compassion an Emotion?” In his opinion, the term “emotion” does not exist in the Tibetan language, which definitely does not mean that Tibetans do not have emotions. The difference is not a complete incommensurability, but a more nuanced difference in mental vocabulary.

According to the Abhidhamma tradition, the mind to which emotions appear has various functions, which continually change. The mind consists in a succession of related, intentional states of awareness constituting a stream or continuum of consciousness. Such a stream is not material; reality is a succession of evanescent moments. Thus, mental and material events interact in a constantly ongoing and fluctuating process. For example, Buddhists may classify their responses to cognized objects as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings. The mental factors allow for a full-blown cognition of an object, including feelings, intentions, and so forth. When cognizing an object, five mental factors (for example, feelings, intentions, and recognition) are present. The main purpose of discussing the mental factors is to differentiate the positive from the negative. What distinguishes virtuous mind states from other factors?

**Is Compassion an Emotion?**

Dreyfus refers to Vasubandhu, who states that a good action is salvific because it brings about pleasant retribution and consequently protects beings from suffering for a certain time. At the same time, it leads to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, and consequently, protects beings indefinitely from suffering. Since we are not enlightened yet, we do not know exactly how actions produce good effects. We must rely on the testimony of enlightened persons found in the scriptures. Many virtuous and nonvirtuous factors are described: faith, detachment, wisdom, loving-kindness, nonharm (compassion), and so forth. The virtuous factors stand in contrast to 28 nonvirtuous factors, such as hatred, attachment ignorance, pride, and jealousy. Other factors are neutral, such as attention, concentration, aspiration, and investigation. Whenever nonvirtuous factors arise they disturb the mind. These factors are called *kleśas*, which can be translated as passions, afflictions,
delusions, negative emotions, and so forth. These afflictions closely resemble the Western concept of emotion. Now the question arises: Are the *kleśas* emotions?

Buddhists definitely intend to eradicate all negative *kleśas*, or emotions. However, it would be misleading to claim that Buddhists aim to eliminate all the factors we call emotions. What Buddhists describe as loving-kindness – wishing well to other beings – is what would commonly be described as an emotion in English. It is an affective response to a situation that also involves somatic factors. When we feel moved by loving-kindness, our heart swells. Hence, it seems clear, that, at a certain level, loving kindness is an emotion. So is compassion, the wish that all beings be free from suffering. Thus the inquiry indicates that there are positive emotions in the Buddhist tradition and that compassion, at least in certain forms, is an emotion. This is so despite the fact that Buddhists do not recognize emotion as a category and that no Buddhist category can be mapped on emotion. However, not all positive mental factors are emotions: Wisdom is certainly not an emotion. Moreover, loving-kindness and compassion can be emotions, but are not necessarily so. Being included in the list of eleven positive factors, they exist potentially in the mind of every human being. But the compassion that naturally exists in humans is limited. It is underdeveloped, weak, and partial. Compassion developed on the Buddhist path is stronger and less limited. This is particularly true for the bodhisattvas who extend their compassion to all sentient beings. Is compassion, throughout its cultivation on the path, an emotion? Is it a mental state so different that it cannot be included in this category?

Bodhisattvas can be either beginners or advanced. Both types of bodhisattva cultivate compassion, but only the former seem to exhibit the psychological and somatic characteristics that we usually associate with emotions. Beginning bodhisattvas are often described as overwhelmed by compassion. They experience compassion by the somatic signs associated with emotions. It is positive in that sense; it does not disturb the peace of mind, but compassion does arouse the mind. When bodhisattvas progress, their compassion seems to change. It is less emotional and accompanied by equanimity. It is very strong, more balanced, and does not lead to emotional outbursts.

Still, is it an emotion? Emotions are not necessarily immediate responses, but can be cultivated, transformed, and enhanced, as was suggested by Aristotle. In that sense, the compassion of an advanced bodhisattva is an emotion. It is the enhancement of the earlier more immediately emotional compassion of beginning bodhisattvas and as such it is still an emotion.

Metz and several other Christian theologians tend to affiliate Buddhism with an “apolitical” compassion. They argue that the Buddha, after his encounter with the suffering of strangers, seeks refuge in the “kingdom of his inner self” in order to find the “landscape that is immune to all suffering.” Heinrich Pompey concludes that in Buddhism one remains distant from the suffering of others and that practical help and caring for others is difficult for Buddhists. This, according to Pompey, might explain why Buddhism developed few institutionalized forms of help along the lines of Western charity organizations. Buddhist charity traditionally operated on an *ad hoc* basis, rather than the highly organized model of support and services to the poor and needy, which are designed to actively relieve them of their suffering as God did through his son Jesus Christ. Pompey concedes that change within society needs to come from inside society and can only be induced by a moral system that is equally valid for individuals and the plurality. According to Pompey, Buddhism does not intend a change of social structures in an exclusively political context.

In conclusion, we may have to expand the concept of emotion to accommodate the levels of compassion described by the Buddhist traditions. Or we may refrain from such an expansion and decide that the more equanimous levels of compassion described by the Buddhist traditions are not emotions after all. What can be stated with certainty is that compassion plays a guiding role in both the Buddhist and Christian traditions. The concept of compassion is central to the path to salvation or liberation, and its practice is healthy and beneficial for human society.
NOTES


2. Hebrews 2,17; 4,15f.

3. Romans 9-11.

4. 2 Corinthians 4, 14.


7. Augustine called this “Selbstverkrümmung des Herzens.”


9. This seems to be the most common error of Western interpretations of Buddhism: nirva is perceived as a “dried plum” and cannot be associated with positive emotion.

10. Asanga and the dog as Maitreya.

11. Unfortunately the majority of Christians know and accept as engagement only the “noisy” type of emotion. Usually the aspect of maturity is neglected, if not unknown.


8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women
“Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past”

Seoul, Korea  June 27 to July 5, 2004
Dharma
and
Discipline
Education and Training for Women at the Time of the Buddha: Implications for Today

Thich Nu Dong Anh

Human beings would never reach perfection without education and training. The world is like an ocean in which people have to learn how to swim in order to cross over. Those who refuse to enter the water will surely end their lives without achieving their goal. Education is indeed the most important component of life. It begins from the day a child takes birth. The mother is the first educator. Then, gradually, the father joins her and thereafter the whole society gets involved.

Gotama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, tried to learn about the world around him, although he was born a prince and brought up in luxury. In due course, he learned about the world with its impermanence and suffering. He vowed to find a peaceful way for humankind. People can realize the highest goal by following the Buddha step by step. Without great wisdom and compassion, the Buddha could not reach his goal. As he neared death, the Buddha reportedly uttered this poem of joy which vividly describes his transcendental moral victory and his inner spiritual experience:

Through many a birth in existence I wandered,
Seeking, but not finding, the builder of this house.
Sorrowful birth is repeated.
O house builder, thou art seen.
Thou shalt build no house again.
All thy rafters are broken. Thy ridge-pole is shattered.
Mind attains the unconditioned, achieved is the end of craving.¹

These verses allude to the end of craving which, after a relentless search, the Buddha found by himself through his own transcendental wisdom. This wise man was called the Buddha, the Perfect One, the Exalted One, or Tathāgatha. The Buddha was an extraordinary man with unique characteristics, but he laid great stress on the fact that he was human, leaving no room for people to fall into the error of thinking that he was an immortal or divine being.

The Buddha thought about a way to share his experience and joy of peace and enlightenment with all humankind. He first sought out his old teachers and friends, the companions with whom he had practiced futile austerities during the six years prior to his attainment of the highest goal. The Buddha's first discourse was the Dhammacakka, which means the Wheel of Truth or the Wheel of Dharma. In this discourse, the Buddha illustrated the middle path that he himself had discovered. Thus, the five monks who had previously been his companions and believed in strict austerities were introduced to the middle path as a means to avoid the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. Neither extreme leads to perfect peace and enlightenment, whereas the middle way leads to peace and enlightenment, from the four stages
to sainthood, to understanding the four noble truths, and finally to realization of the ultimate goal, nibbana.

During his first discourse, the Buddha explained the way of the middle-path which is known as the Noble Eight-fold Path: right understanding, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Thereafter the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths in greater depth. The first Noble Truth is the suffering (dukkha) of all sentient beings. The Buddha explained that birth is suffering, decay is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with the unpleasant is suffering, to be separated from the pleasant is suffering, not to get what one desires is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering. The Buddha elaborates this point in the Anattalakkhana Sutta Mahāvagga (Samyutta Nikāya): “Form (rūpa), feelings (vedana), perceptions (sañña), mental states (samkhāra), and consciousness (viññana) are soulless, impermanent, and suffering. These should be understood by right knowledge in their real nature as: These are not mine; I am not these; these are not my soul.”

The Buddha further said that when one understands the nature of Dhamma, he/she is detached from abhorrent things and is emancipated through detachment. The Buddha taught his disciples, both monastics and laypeople, for 45 years to ensure that all human beings can be aware of the truth of things from the point of view of one’s own right understanding and right concentration. By right knowledge and right effort, he/she can overcome all attachment to things and attain peace and happiness here and now. In this way, the Buddha sets a perfect example for all. Thus, one can very well say that the Buddha is a brilliant teacher, possessing great compassion and wisdom.

Important features of the Buddhist Sangha should be mentioned with respect to the education and training of Buddhist nuns and laywomen. Women were permitted by the Exalted One to join the order. This was the first time in the history of the world that an order with its own unique rules and regulations was established for women. Sariputta and Moggallana were representatives for the order of monks and two chief female disciples, Khema and Uppalavanna, represented the order of nuns. The most important thing about the Buddha’s decision to allow women to also practice the homeless life is that, as the Buddha clearly and emphatically reiterated to Ānanda, women are just as capable of realizing sainthood as men. However, the Buddha insisted that women had to accept eight chief rules (attha garudhamma). In general, the Buddha gave the same teaching to both women and men and sometimes went out of his way to teach women. In fact, the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment for the sake of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. At one point the Buddha is reported to have said that if the four groups of people would teach the Dhamma, establish, expand, analyze, and make it clear, then the Buddha would never die. The Buddha’s order, the Sangha, was not exclusivistic. People of any status and from all classes of society – educated, rich, poor, high, low, young, and old were all freely admitted into the order and lived like brothers of the same family without any distinction.

During the Buddha’s lifetime, the caste system was firmly rooted in Indian society. To counter this degrading class system, the Buddha taught a higher morality and the idea of universal brotherhood for the entire human race. The Buddha declared as follows:

By birth one is not an outcast,
By birth one is not a Brahmin.
By deeds one is an outcast,
By deeds one is a Brahmin.²

Thus one can see that the Buddha pays respect to all. The Buddha emphasized that everyone joining the order should receive equal honor and reverence without any discrimination, whether they be from the class of warriors, scavengers, courtesans, fishermen, brahmans, and so on. In fact, they were to be treated as ariyas (noble ones).
According to the Buddha, gender is no barrier for purification. He views both men and women as an integrated whole and gives them their due place. He never looks down on women. Accordingly, both male and female disciples of the Buddha can achieve the state of an arahant as is evident from this utterance:

Monks who are arahants,
Nuns who are arahants,
Celibate laymen who are non-returners,
Celibate laywomen who are non-returners,
Laymen who are without doubt and perplexity (i.e., stream-enterers),
Laywomen who are without doubt and perplexity.

The Buddha mentioned the distinctive qualities of preeminent nuns: Mahāprajāpātī Gotamī as the long-standing leader of the nuns; Khema of great wisdom; Uppalavanna and Patacara noted for their monastic discipline; Dhammadinna, known for her Dhamma teaching; Nanda for dedication; Sona for her energetic striving, and so forth. The number of preeminent nuns is 102 and their contributions are mentioned in 73 verses in the the Therīgāthā in Pāli.3

Nuns and laywomen remain respectful and full of gratitude to Mahāprajāpatī Gotami, the founder and the leader of the bhikkhuni order, and to the Exalted One who had the mind of great compassion and great wisdom and thus initiated the idea of raising the status of women and enabling their potential to contribute to peace in society and the world. Therefore, Bhikkhunī Mahāprajāpatī is revered as a great teacher all over the world. Besides the Exalted One and Mahāprajāpatī, the first and foremost leader of the bhikkhuni order, one more name shines out: Ānanda who worked tirelessly for the establishment of the bhikkhuni order.

Life as a nun was highly esteemed. The nuns were required to follow all the rules of the solitary life. They lived with seven requisites and ate one meal a day. A female novice (samānerī) was trained with six percepts for two years.4 In the first stage of entering the order, a woman aspirant could choose to be a sikkhāmāna, a female Buddhist probationer, for two years. To become a bhikkhunī one had to obey 311 rules and the eight chief rules. The nuns practiced very energetically to attain liberation and enlightenment and thus to complete their responsibility to laymen and especially laywomen. This is frequently mentioned in the Therīgāthā.5

Laywomen were also given training as much as was possible. For example, Visakha was the devout and generous daughter of the millionaire Dhananjaya. She was only seven years old when, after hearing the Dhamma from the Buddha, she attained the first stage of sainthood (stream enterer, sotapatti). Since that day she became a good disciple to the Buddha and the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Saṅghas. It is said she was the greatest female supporter of the Buddha. She won the hearts of the nuns as well, by her good conduct, graceful development, refined manners, courteous speech, obedience, and so on. She led a successful life and became a good example for all, especially laywomen, both young and old.

Visakha did many good deeds in her life and received great respect from everyone. She would shine forever in many hearts. Visakha improved herself enormously and proved herself worthy to repay her debt to the Buddha for what he had taught her, as well as to people in general. It is wise for laymen and laywomen to consider emulating her. Because of Visakha’s success in life and the success of laymen such as Yasa and Anathapindika, it is said that the Buddha’s method of education and training was excellent and had a great influence on the order of nuns.

The purpose for entering the Saṅgha is to realize impermanence, suffering, and no-self. The practice is to observe that every particle of the body, every process of the mind, is in a state of constant flux. There is nothing that remains beyond a single moment, no hard core to which one can cling, nothing that one can call “I” or “mine.” This “I” is really just a combination of processes that are always changing. With well-grounded education and training, if this understanding is applied, practitioners should surely get good
results for themselves and others, from age to age and generation to generation.

Full-fledged membership in the bhikkhuni order was attained in two stages: (1) admission at the age of 12 for those who had been married, and (2) upon attaining the age of twenty, the minimum age requirement for membership of the Order. One could debate whether admitting women while they are still teenagers is justified or not. One may not agree with admission of a child to the community of women recluses at a stage when the mind is not sufficiently mature to understand the implications of the arduous life of a bhikkhuni. Some may interpret this as an imposition on young women who are not in a position to form their own judgments. This practice may not be suitable in the present-day context. But, if the matter is left as a matter of free conscience, then perhaps a child could be admitted to the order to receive education and training if she wishes. In such a situation, members of the order should have sufficient compassion, patience, and wisdom to help young people through their training and education in the rigorous life of a nun.

Where children are admitted as novices (samānerī), the order can provide something special for those children during the period when their minds are fresh. But at that time they need to receive proper care from adult bhikkhunīs, for example, instructions about how to live the Noble Eight-fold Path. At this stage of the training, young people require careful guidance and supervision. Before offering admission, members of the order should be prepared to provide this. If the order is prepared to make an investment in young nuns as a potential human resource for the future, training methods must be developed and suitable institutions established. If these issues can be satisfactorily addressed, and members of the order want to share the great tradition of the Buddha with humankind, then there is no great cause for concern.

To educate the younger generation, people must provide the right kind of leadership in all aspects of life. They should promote equality and social justice. The environment for study is the most important. It is very beneficial for young people to receive right guidance from a skillful teacher who has knowledge and understanding. If children are provided with good conditions and instruction, they will be able to concentrate on their goals.

In the current world situation, there is good reason to carefully consider the continuation of nunneries. The impact of western culture all over the world is obstructing the bhikkhunīs’ practicing the faultless life. In the present atmosphere, particularly in Western countries but increasingly at a global level, there are many stimulants that seriously challenge the vow of chastity. Those who choose this path do so under a great deal of stress. Under the circumstances, should the rules be relaxed or considerably moderated or should they be adhered to in their original meaning as in the time of the Buddha? The question calls into question the meaning of the Vinaya and the precepts (śīla). The Vinaya, which deals mainly with the rules and regulations of the orders of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs, is considered “the anchor of the holy life.”

Until nearly 20 years after the Buddha’s enlightenment no definite rules were laid down to control or discipline the Saṅgha. Subsequently, as occasions arose, the Buddha promulgated rules that became the future discipline of the Saṅgha. The precepts were regarded as a means to observe moral restraint and self-control and were greatly emphasized as way to protect others and purify one’s own character.

Irrigators lead waters,
Fletchers bend the shafts,
Carpenters bend the wood,
The wise control themselves.6

The Buddha made many rules for the training of nuns. According to the Theravāda tradition, there are 311 rules, including eight of the gravest type. Besides observing these rules, the other most important aspect of the training is developing the mind. The most important aspect of the nuns’ training is to meditate on non-substantiality (śūnyatā). Prior to meditating on non-substantiality, one must meditate on the four sublime ideas (brahmavihāras), namely metta (friendliness), mudita (loving kindness), karuna (compassion),
and upakkha (equanimity). The practice of anapana sati (mindfulness of breathing) prepares the ground for higher practices of meditation.

Buddhist education emphasizes ethics (sīla), concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (pañña). With effort and investigation of reality, one can discover and eliminate the roots of suffering: craving, aversion, and ignorance. In the Buddha’s teachings, learning and practice always work together. In all Buddhist schools, the main emphasis is on training the mind. This emphasis was interpreted in such a way that many monasteries and nunneries began to function as seats of learning, rather than as mere shelters for sequestered spiritual culture. Hence monasteries and nunneries underwent substantial development in the fields of education and training even as early as first century CE.

Many Buddhist institutions of international repute developed thereafter and became great seats of learning, a practice that continues until today. Buddhist education and training has made an enormous contribution to the world and the contributions of nuns have been extraordinary. Discussion today could profitably focus on what has been most positive throughout the centuries in the growth of Buddhist education and what have been the major pitfalls. From an international perspective, a thorough consideration of these issues would empower women devotees of the Buddha the world over and encourage them to raise the banner of Buddhist nuns for all to see.

NOTES

1. Dhammapada 20.
2. Vasala Sutta, Sutta Nipata.
6. Dhammapada 80.
Buddhist Women and Discipline: An Historical Perspective

Thich Nu Gioi Huong

In male-oriented societies, the status of women is judged to be inferior to that of men, but such a prejudice is not acceptable in a rational society. The Buddha was the first religious teacher to recognize women's potential and to provide opportunities for women to develop their social and spiritual capabilities.

The inferior status of women in the Buddha's time is linked with the fact that women were not initially admitted to the Sāṅgha, despite repeated entreaties by his close disciple Ānanda and foster mother Mahāprajāpāti Gotami. However, this is a useless controversy, since we know that the Buddha was also reluctant to initiate men after his enlightenment, a period called his “silence.” “After receiving Ānanda's assurances on Gotami's behalf that she would to abide by the eight special rules (attha garudhamma), the Buddha admitted her.”¹

Mahāprajāpāti Gotami accepted these eight special rules and entered the Sāṅgha along with 500 women of noble families. These rules are related to the general rules of discipline:²

1. A nun who has been ordained (even) for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day.
2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks.
3. Every half-month a nun should desire two things from the order of monks: the asking (as to the date) of the Observance day, and the coming for the exhortation.
4. After the rains a nun must invite before both orders in respect of three things: what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.
5. A nun offending against important rules must undergo manatta (discipline) for a half-month before both orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has been trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek higher ordination from both orders.
7. A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.
8. From today admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden.

The insistence on these rules is a vital issue in the monastic discipline of women. The Dharmagupta Vinaya (in the Chinese) compares the rules to a bridge over a great river by means of which one may cross to the other shore.³ The scriptures say that all the 500 bhikkunis who joined the order attained the bliss of liberation. Reviewing the discipline of the bhikkunis in the Sāṅgha, the Buddha himself amended the procedure for conferring upasampadā on bhikkunis:⁴ “O monks, I allow nuns to get ordained in the pure order of monks after having been ordained in the order of nuns.” From this it is clear that the order of nuns was privileged to approve a candidate for ordination and also to perform her pavarāna (assembly marking the last day of the rainy season retreat) in two stages, first in the order itself and then before the order of monks.⁵
Women were given more privileges than in the past, but they were also given more responsibilities. Instead of being limited to the roles of marriage and childbearing, they were allowed to join the Sāṅgha and pursue liberation like the monks. However, they were expected to observe the eight special rules, which were probably formulated to keep them humble. They were allowed to receive the bhikkhuni disciplinary precepts and to recite the Bhikkhuni Patimokkha that contained them, but they were expected to observe many more precepts that the monks. There are 227 precepts for monks in the Pāli Vinaya, whereas there are 311 precepts for nuns." The Bhikkhuni Patimokkha Sutta was compiled at Sravasti and the bhikkhuni precepts are organized into seven sections.

The Pāli Vinaya Pitaka mentions 59 women and 305 men. The percentage of women mentioned is therefore 16.2 percent of the total. This means that, although the Buddha opened the doors of this movement to women and women readily joined, the attitudes of society toward women apparently changed slowly. Despite that, large numbers of women excelled in different fields.

The three principal sources of legends and life stories of the early nuns are the Apadana, the Anguttara Nikaya, and the Therīgāthā (Psalms of the Sisters). The Therīgāthā is eloquent about the distinguished careers of the therīs (senior nuns) who, by their selfless service and strong determination, attained nibbāna. The Pāli work Manorathapuranī contains a list of eminent therīs, samānerīs (novice nuns), and upāsikās (female lay devotees). This work is a commentary on the Anguttara Nikaya.

By winning the permission of the Buddha to found the order of nuns, Mahāprajāpatī Gotamī earned the gratitude of several capable, yet sometimes imperfect and distressed, women who later achieved liberation from worldly ties. In some suttas, for example the Anguttara Nikaya and Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha makes statements such as, “If thou, my dear, go forth from home to the homeless, see that thou become like the almswoman Khema and the almswoman Uppalavanna.” Khema, whose name means “welfare” or “nibbāna,” was a laywoman during the time of Padmottara Buddha. During the time of Kassapa Buddha, as the eldest daughter of Kiki, King of Varanasi, she was a women named Samani who led a pious life and built a monastery for the Buddha. During the time of Vipassi Buddha, she preached the Dharma. During the time of Kakusandha and Konagamana, she built great monasteries and offered them to the Buddha and the Sāṅgha.

During the time of Gotamīa Buddha, Khema took birth in the royal Sagala family in Madradesa and became the chief consort of King Bimbisara of Magadha. It is said that she never appeared before the Buddha, because she thought the Tathagata did not appreciate feminine beauty. But one day King Bimbasara made an offering to the Buddha and his retinue at Veluvana (Bamboo Grove) and invited singers to the palace. At this time, Khema appeared before the Buddha. To quell Khema’s pride, the Buddha conjured up an woman in the form of a celestial nymph who fanned him with a palm-fan. To Khema’s great surprise, this nymph suddenly became transformed, first into a middle-age woman and then into an old woman with wrinkled skin, broken teeth, and grey hair. Khema’s pride in her youthful beauty vanished as she listened to this stanza:

Those who are slaves to passions follow the stream (of craving) as a spider the web which he has made himself. Wise people, when they have cut this (craving), leave the world, free from cares, leaving all sorrow behind.8

The commentary on the Therīgāthā adds that when the Buddha completed this verse, Khema attained the state of an arhat. She became renowned as a wise, learned, and pious woman.

The Therīgāthā recounts the realizations and spiritual achievements of the great therīs. In this work, the therīs relate their experiences of life in a frank manner and express their ecstatic joy and faith in the Therīgāthā. For example, Uppalavanna was theri of great talent. In previous births, she acquired supernormal powers and gave alms to the Buddha. During the time of Buddha Śkyamuni, she was born as the daughter.
of a banker of Śravasti. She was a remarkably handsome maiden, the color of a blue lotus. When she came of age, she received marriage proposals from many princes and kings of the country, but because of her true faith she preferred to become ordained as a nun. One day she was treacherously duped by her cousin Ānanda, who molested her in a forest glen. Due to this incident, she ran away from home and lived the life of a celibate nun from that time on. She meditated diligently, taking a lamp as the object of her meditation. She developed the single-pointed concentration (samādhi) of the four dhyānas (tejokasina) and higher spiritual powers (patisambhida). Ultimately, she attained the state of an arhat with higher knowledge (abhijnana).

The great nun Saṅghamitra was the daughter of the famous king Asoka of India. Along with her brother Mahendra, she converted King Tissa of Sinhala (now Sri Lanka) and founded the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha by ordaining Queen Anula with 500 ladies of aristocratic families. A tooth relic (danta-dhatu) of the Buddha was brought to the island by Hemamala, the daughter of the king of Kalinga, and her husband Dantakumara in the fourth century CE. Kumaradevi, the queen of Govindachandra, who was the king of Kanyakubja and Varanasi, repaired a dharma-cakra-jina image of the Buddha and constructed a large monastery for bhikkhunis at Sarnath with massive masonry that is evidence of the flourishing of Buddhism in the eleventh century. The Bhikkhuni Saṅgha lasted for a thousand years in Sri Lanka and this tradition did not cease altogether. Because that lineage was transmitted to China, we can now revive the order in South and Southeast Asia and eventually restore the Bhikkhu Saṅgha as a living lineage in Cambodia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Tibet.

Throughout ancient times up to the eleventh century, women came forward to offer donations to monasteries and temples, and install the images of enlightened figures in them. There are biographies of eminent Buddhist nuns and laywomen who lived saintly lives and illumined the world with their qualities. In the Buddha's own time we have records of the achievements of Yasodhara, Khema, Uppalavanna, Kundalakesi, Kapilani, Soma, Ubbiri, Rohini, Patachara, Anupama, Nandi, and others. From the records found in the Vamsa literature of Simhala, we also know the names of preeminent nuns of later times, including Saṅghamitra, Dhammapala, Sudhamma, Malla, Aggomitta, Uttara, Hema, and others. Buddhist women played important roles in later social and religious developments. For example, in Sri Lanka Sirimavo Bandaranayike became Prime Minister and her daughter Chandrika Kumaratunga became the President of her country.

In 280 CE, the order of nuns was established in China when Chen Chien became the first nun. In 429, the nun Devasara was sent by King Sri Meghavanna to China with seven other sisters and the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha gradually grew in size. Throughout the centuries, Chinese nuns have worked for peace and good will.

In Vietnamese history, bhikkhunis such as Dam Soan, Dieu Khong, Hai Trieu Am, Nhu Thanh, and Huynh Lien became greater Dharma teachers and played active roles in the fields of education, culture, and social work. In our own time, there are celebrated Buddhist women leaders in Tibetan, Nepalese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese traditions who are working to establish Buddhist temples and centers. It is greatly encouraging that women in many European and American organizations have taken the initiative to establish their own temples, retreats, and monasteries for Buddhist women. These women play important roles to counteract destructive social and moral developments that are wholly against women's best interests.

The basic issues that face men and women today concern how to adapt to developments in the new social order characterized by alienation, violence, and restlessness. Modern intellectual and scientific ideas have encouraged analytical wisdom, but unfortunately, new social freedoms may also result in a decline of moral values. Consequently, there is a great need to create social structures that support virtuous living, combat poverty, sustain human rights, promote ethical conduct, and recover cultural traditions, all of which are now in a precarious state.

The greatest problem is how to transmit positive values to future generations. To accomplish this task, it is appropriate for women and men to be viewed on equal terms. All human beings, both male and female, have both masculine and feminine qualities within them. The Buddha did not discriminate between the
intellectual and spiritual capacities of men and women. Although Buddhist attitudes towards women have sometimes seemed ambivalent or even negative, attitudes have changed and it is easy to see the positive impact women have on Buddhism today.

NOTES

2. Ibid.
3. Taisho, Vol. 22, p. 923 B.
6. There are 227 precepts for *bhikkhus* and 311 precepts for *bhikkhunis* in the Pāli Vinaya. In the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition practiced in China, Korea, and Vietnam, there are 250 precepts for *bhikkhus* and 348 precepts for *bhikkhunis*.
The Training and Education of Nuns in Sri Lanka

Ranjani de Silva

The community of nuns was established in Sri Lanka in the third century BCE when Theri Sangamitta, daughter of Emperor Asoka of India, arrived in Sri Lanka with a group of bhikkunis. According to the commentaries, all of those nuns were arahats and were learned. They resided in the capital city of Anuradhapura at that time and taught the Vinaya and various suttas to the women of Sri Lanka. Princess Anula and her large retinue received ordination and became the first group of bhikkunis in Sri Lanka in 237 BCE.

The Bhikkhuni Sangha received full royal support and prospered for more than a thousand years. Ven. Sangamitta remained in Sri Lanka until she passed away in 197 BC. There is strong evidence that women played an influential role in the early cultural and religious history of the country as revealed by chronicles and rock inscriptions from the third century BCE. The Dipavamsa, which dates to the fourth century CE and is the earliest example of a recorded history in Sri Lanka, is believed to have been written by nuns. This chronicle is a woman-centered history (her story). It records in detail the establishment of the order of nuns in Sri Lanka, and how it developed and expanded to other parts of the country, and the spiritual and intellectual achievements of the nuns.

Among those nuns who received higher ordination during the earliest phase of development, the Dipavamsa mentions that many were well versed, wise, and were leaders. They taught the Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma pitakas in Anuradhapura. Nuns from the southern province joined the nuns in Anuradhapura. It is said that during the period from 161-137 BCE, 20,000 nuns taught the Vinaya. The king received advice from the nuns and he provided them with all their requisites.

The Dipavamsa, the first chronicle, describes that the nuns had excelled in different sections of the canon, but the study of Vinaya was given the highest place, and the continuity of the study of Vinaya was emphasized. They have been described as having great wisdom, great fame, cleverness, and so forth. Some nuns were known as illustrious teachers of Dhamma, some were endowed with supernormal powers (abiññā), and many others were known for their special skills. It is evident that trained and educated nuns can be a valuable resource for the community, both spiritually and socially.

Today, Sakyadhita Sri Lanka is part of the driving force for the reestablishment of the order of nuns in Sri Lanka after a lapse of 1000 years. The association is doing its very best to see to it that the education of the nuns is given a special place among many efforts to support the freshly ordained nuns.

The example of the bhikkuni order of the past is a good model. At the present time the need for good education as the basis for teaching the Dhamma in its pure form is being stressed. Besides following the Pratimokka and practicing it well, the teaching of Dhamma is one of the main duties and responsibilities of the bhikkunis toward their sisters who did not have a chance to get a good education and toward the lay community. It is also important that the bhikkunis continue their meditation practice while engaged in social service activities.
Of course, it is difficult to find ideal circumstances anywhere. Individually, bhikkhunis may choose to put more emphasis on study and teaching whereas others may choose meditation. In addition, the lay community is happy that the bhikkhunis have started to do counseling in Sri Lanka, so bhikkhunis inclined to do social work have many chances to get involved in this field and thereby become fully accepted by the lay community.

Sakyadhita Sri Lanka was fortunate to receive funds from the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Germany with the aim of empowering women to establish a center for the training and education of nuns. This center was set up 15 km south of Colombo in Panadura District. There are two rooms with attached bathrooms for guests, such as visiting teachers. An assembly hall with a statue of the Buddha serves many purposes: conducting training courses, Dhamma teachings, meditation, and pūjās. On full moon days, many women, children, and also men come to observe the precepts. The day's program is conducted by the resident nuns. Through the charity of the devotees, morning and noon meals are served to all the upāpakas (laymen) and upāsikas (laywomen) on these full moon days. There is a dining hall with a kitchen pantry and storeroom, which can also be used for different purposes. In the quarters for the nuns, there are seven rooms that can accommodate one to four nuns in one room. During residential training courses, 25 to 30 nuns can be accommodated, with all meals and facilities provided at the center.

Next to these quarters, there is another building with two offices. On the second floor, there is a library with two computers that enable the nuns to study, translate, and develop their computer skills. At the very end of the compound, we planted a bodhi tree with an altar and surrounded it with a wall. From here, we have an open view of a big lake and a wonderful landscape that is very peaceful and quiet. Nuns make their offerings and do chanting in the open air daily. Many laypeople, especially women and children, come with flowers and incense in the evening, especially on the weekends, to join the nuns in their offerings and chanting. At the end, they meditate, talk with the nuns, and then disperse.

Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center was inaugurated on May 10, 2000. At present, there are 12 resident nuns. During the past three years, many training courses were held for senior bhikkhunis representing many districts. In the training program on social development, expert training was conducted for two groups of senior bhikkhunis. Senior lecturers of the Sri Lanka Association of Professional Social Workers conducted this training in the basic skills needed to work with communities. It was a residential training program continued for a period of six months with short intervals. Two groups of senior nuns, with 30 in each group, were trained as Trainers in Social Development Work. During the training, assignments were given and progress review meetings were held and certificates were awarded to those who completed the course.

The subjects covered at this training included: (1) human growth and behavior, (2) basic skills in working with people, (3) leadership and working in groups, (4) communications and training methodology, (5) Buddhist philosophy and social development, and (6) counseling. As a second step, a course in human service management was conducted to assist these nuns in delivering services productively through their āramas (monasteries) using modern concepts and techniques in management. These concepts included library services, storekeeping, finance management, and the organization of āramas in ancient times.

Another training that was conducted for the bhikkhunis was health education, including primary health care and first aid. Some of the areas covered with special attention were maternal and child healthcare, nutrition, and home nursing. After the training, an examination was held and certificates were awarded. At the village level, also, Sakyadhita follows up with many training programs for nuns at their nunneries in the villages. After the trainings, a first aid kit with medicines is donated to the ārama and the nunnery serves as the first aid center for that village. A house-to-house medical survey was also introduced and the nuns conducted the surveys with the help of the community. This program was welcomed by the community, since it brought immediate benefits to the society.
The bhikkunis are more accepted by the community as leaders in their villages and, with the professional training they received at the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center, are now able to serve the community with greater confidence. We receive many reports from the nuns about their achievements as social workers. They have successfully resolved many disputes in families and in the community, sometimes even in saving the lives of people in distress.

Government officials and other Buddhist institutions especially appreciate those nuns who are inclined to do social work inside and outside their āramas. The nuns teach the Dhamma to children and, in this way, are uplifting the morale of the people of Sri Lanka, which has deteriorated as a consequence of 20 years of civil war.

Monks do not openly protest any more against the reestablishment of the bhikkuni order, but formal authorization by the Buddha sāsana has still not been received. Anyway, everybody expects formal authorization to be given sooner or later, because, since the bhikkuni order is already in existence, the facts speak for themselves.

One of the strongest supporters of the bhikkuni issue was the monk, Ven. Tallale Dhammaloka Anunayaka Thera. On the sad occasion of his passing away last year, the president of Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, wrote a message of condolence praising him for his unsurpassable status as an eloquent exponent of the Buddhadhamma, specifically mentioning, “He pioneered the cause of revival of the bhikkuni sasana which was defunct.” This shows how much the reestablishment of the bhikkuni order has now become an accepted fact.

Since the inauguration of Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center, two elderly, highly educated bhikkunis, who did not belong to a particular dasasilmātā ārama before, joined the center as resident nuns and are now English teachers for the younger nuns. A young bhikkuni with an MA in Buddhist philosophy who has practiced as a nun for 24 years has been appointed to serve as the head nun at the center. She is organizing many activities at the center with the participation of other nuns.

Very often we provide shelter to foreign bhikkunis or śrāmaṇerikās who come from all over the world. Sometimes these nuns are seeking to study Pāli and Sanskrit and practice together with their Sri Lankan sisters and sometimes they are preparing for the bhikkuni ordination in Sri Lanka. We have held several ordinations for nuns in the Theravāda tradition and these have been attended by nuns coming from many countries. Already these ordinations have included nuns from Thailand, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Burma, the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, New Zealand, and Australia. We have received many requests from many other nuns and women who wish to receive ordination in Sri Lanka.

The financial support we get from the Heinrich Böll Foundation will end by the year 2004. The maintenance and continuation of the training and education at the Sakyadhita Center will need to continue, so we need to make plans for the future. Sponsoring nuns for higher education and training at the center requires the generous help of the Buddhist community. We hope that with the official acceptance of the Bhikkhuni Sangha, the Sri Lankan government will also support the center in the future.

Sakyadhita Sri Lanka currently supports 20 nuns studying at universities with a stipend of Rs. 500 per month and another 100 student nuns who are sitting for other exams with a stipend of Rs 250 per month. The nuns use this very small amount for transportation expenses and buying books. We definitely want to continue this help and appreciate any financial help for this specific project.

At the Sakyadhita Center we also conduct classes in monastic education, Sanskrit, Pāli, and Buddhist philosophy for those nuns who wish to sit for examinations and a full day of meditation for laywomen once a week. An elderly nun teaches English to the children in the nearby village. Many women come daily to meet the nuns for advice and the nuns are able to provide counseling services. The nuns are often invited for dāna (meals) in their homes, to perform chanting, and to give blessings for the sick and old.

All meals (dāna), including breakfast and lunch, are supplied daily by the community. Once a year, after the rainy season retreat (vassa), the robes ceremony (kathina) is held and hundreds of people participate.
The villagers go in procession around the village, down many roads, with drummers and Buddhist flags and bring the robes (katina cheevara) to the center before dawn. They give dāna and offer the robes to the bhikkhunis who have spent the retreat at the center. This is a ritual that was previously allowed only for bhikkhus, but now the bhikkhunis are also following the Vinaya traditions for fully ordained monastics. All the bhikkhunis in all āramas now perform this ceremony after the vassa full participation of the community.

In Sri Lanka the bhikkhunis now have the opportunity to perform all the rituals that were performed only by bhikkhus in the past. The nuns are now equally recognized as equal members belonging to the Saṅgha community. Often the monks invite the nuns to conduct meditation and give sermons at their temples. We look forward to the dawn of this new era with the hope that more and more bhikkhunis will develop their inner spiritual resources and become educated and to serve the society as Dhamma teachers. In this way, nuns will bring about very positive changes in the social and cultural spheres and help create a better society. During the third century BCE, during the Anuradhapura period, such a society is said to have existed and was known as the golden era of Sri Lanka. With the reestablishment of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha, women today are working to again usher in a golden era of Dhamma.

NOTES

Ordained Women in Yellow Robes: An Unfamiliar “Tradition” in Contemporary Thailand

Tomomi Ito

Thailand is known as a Buddhist country and a Buddhist monk in yellow robes is an essential part of the Thai landscape. However, many Thai people associate the yellow robes only with male Buddhist monks and novices, not with females. Thai people find it difficult to imagine a woman taking the same yellow robes and duties as a monk who chants, meditates, collects alms, and gives religious advice to laypeople. They say that religious women in their society are mae chis, who wear white robes. Even those who know the word bhikkhuni often regard a bhikkhuni as something that existed during the Buddha’s time, but no longer exists in the present, or only exists as part of some foreign traditions in Mahāyāna Buddhism. In February 2001 these customary conceptions were challenged by Ven. Dhammananda, who, in Sri Lanka, received the ten precepts and the yellow robes of a sāmaṇerī (female novice) in the Theravāda tradition. Two years later, in February 2003, she went forward to become a fully ordained bhikkhuni in Sri Lanka. Following Dhammananda’s sāmaṇerī ordination, another six Thai women became sāmaṇerīs by March 2004. Full ordination for Buddhist women has now formally started to find its way into Thai society by tracing ancient and foreign traditions.

This article examines three questions regarding the bhikkhuni movement in Thailand: (1) how the seven Thai women found ways to become ordained; (2) what happened to their status in society after ordination; and (3) how they are dealing with the reintroduction of women’s full ordination in relation to the monk authorities of the existing Thai Saṅgha, the official monastic order.1

Expanding Thai Women’s Opportunities for Ordination

First, how did the seven women become ordained, either as a sāmaṇerī or a bhikkhuni? There were three routes to ordination. The first route was to travel to Sri Lanka and receive ordination there through a link with international Buddhists. The second was to seek assistance from Dhammananda, a pioneer who has frequent contact with Sri Lankan bhikkhunis. The third alternative was to receive precepts from a Thai monk. In fact, none of these three options were easily available to Thai woman who wished to be ordained.

The first route – to receive ordination through international connections – made ordination possible for Dhammananda and Rattavali.2 Dhammananda, an international scholar of Buddhism, was the first Thai Theravāda sāmaṇerī to settle back in Thailand and to later become a bhikkhuni. Rattanavali, the second Thai to become a sāmaṇerī in Sri Lanka, was assisted by an American bhikkhuni. Yet, the opportunity to make these sort of international connections requires at least a basic knowledge of English, something that is not readily available to Thai mae chii and other women dedicated to Buddhism.

The second route to receive ordination was an opportunity Dhammananda offered to women in Thailand. During the 2002 vassa (rainy season retreat), she successfully organized the ordination of Dhammarakkhita,
the third sāmaneri, at her temple outside of Bangkok. Following that event, Dhammananda provided an opportunity for more Thai women to train in the formally ordained life. Although the three-month training course was filled with many interesting programs for the participants to learn many things, Dhammananda’s rules and requirements for receiving sāmaneri ordination were unfortunately perceived as too demanding for the course participants. For Dhammananda, there was a good reason to make those rules. In Thailand, people did not yet have sufficient understanding about women’s ordination, so there was a high risk that future Thai sāmaneris and bhikkhunis would not be accepted by any temple other than Dhammananda’s. For this reason, Dhammananda had to be very careful to find candidates who had the appropriate capabilities to become sāmaneris and could then live peacefully as members of the same monastic community. Among the twenty or so participants, only one laywoman was selected by Dhammananda. In March 2003, this woman traveled to Sri Lanka together with Dhammananda, who was scheduled to take bhikkhuni ordination there, and the woman was ordained as Dhammadhari, the fifth sāmaneri.

The third route, getting ordained by a Thai monk, is the one Thai women consider the best option. This option is unlikely to become popular, because of the 1928 Supreme Patriarch’s proclamation that banned all bhikkhus and sāmaneras from ordaining a woman as a sāmaneri, bhikkhuni, or sikkhamānā (probationary nun). However, recently two Thai monks stepped forward to become preceptors to three mae chis in order to ordain them as sāmaneris: Silananda, the fourth, who was ordained in November 2002; Dhammaditta, the sixth, ordained at the end of 2003; and Suketta, the seventh, ordained in February 2004. One of those two monks, Thongmun Thirapanyo Bhikkhu, never concealed the fact that he was ordaining two women as sāmaneris. He said that he did not have any ecclesiastical title or position in the Thai Sangha administration, but had been in robes long enough to be qualified to give ten precepts to either sāmanera (male novice) or sāmaneri candidates. So far, no one has come to investigate him; even at a meeting with a monk who held a position in the local Sangha administration, the monk inquired about nothing except his health. Insofar as the Thai Sangha elders find it difficult to punish monks through a strict enforcement of the 1928 proclamation, Thai monk preceptors could take advantage of the opportunity to ordain Thai women.

Difficult access and limited opportunities for ordination prevent Thai women from being ordained as sāmaneris and bhikkhunis. Anxiety about life after ordination is another reason for hesitation. Silananda said that before making her decision to be ordained, her greatest concern was the possibility that she might no longer be accepted by the people and communities she was familiar with. Let us examine what the newly ordained women actually experienced in a Thai Buddhist community after becoming a sāmaneri.

**Being a Sāmaneri in a Thai Buddhist Community**

Since there have been only a few people who have ever seen bhikkhunis (Thai: phiksuni) or sāmaneris in Thailand, the existence of these recently ordained bhikkhunis and sāmaneris are a great challenge to Thai people’s conceptions. When people encounter someone unconventional, there may be three sorts of reactions or responses that come to mind: unintentional misunderstandings, acceptance, and aversion.

Unintentional misunderstandings are often based on the conventional assumption that only male monastics don yellow robes. For example, when a bhikkhuni or sāmaneri in yellow robes is waiting for a motorbike taxi, a female driver never stops for her, because she assumes the monastic must be male and, as a Buddhist, she knows that it inappropriate for a woman to sit with a monk. On the other hand, when a male driver approaches her, she has to explain that she is a female monastic and decline a ride. When a bhikkhuni or sāmaneri travels by bus, she always has to tell male passengers not to sit next to her, but explain that females may. Consequently, it is not very easy for a bhikkhu or sāmaneri to travel outside her temple, even for a short distance.

Though it is unusual to see a woman in yellow robes, Thai Buddhist villagers show positive signs of their readiness to accept a woman who makes this choice. Whether one is male or female, people instantly
understand, without need for explanation, that the ordained person is a source of religious guidance and should be respected. When people are accepting and pleased to see a female monastic, they offer her food on her daily morning alms, invite her for the midday meal, seek religious advice about their troubles in life, and ask for supervision in meditation, chanting, and other religious practices, just as they do with a male monastic. Almost no one expects her to work as a cook or a sweeper in the temple, although mae chii are often pressured to do so in the monks’ temples. For Thai Buddhists, it is clear that women in yellow robes play roles that are equivalent to those of monks.

Thai bhikkhunis and sāmaṇerīs are not always free from negative reactions, however. For example, Dhammarakkhita found it problematic to stay at Wat Plai Na, the temple where she used to stay as a mae chi. An influential laywoman who donated the temple land did not like the fact that Dhammarakkhita had become ordained as a sāmaṇerī. Twice, the woman reported to the Department of Religious Affairs and asked that Dhammarakkhita be investigated by the authorities, but the officials who came to the temple paid respect to Dhammarakkhita and did not do anything more than reiterate to her the common belief that the bhikkhuni lineage has been extinguished and can never be recovered. Another laywoman spread a false rumor about the relationship between Dhammarakkhita and Kosin Paripunno Bhikkhu, the temple abbot, who was the keenest monk advocate for women’s ordination. Still, Dhammarakkhita said that the majority in the community was quite supportive of her. On her morning alms round, people offered so much food that she could not carry it all herself. In Chiangmai a monk even offered her a portion of land belonging to his temple for her to use for women’s practice.

Overall, it seems that many laypeople and monks do not have enough knowledge about women’s ordination to have strong opinions, so they behave politely towards the bhikkhunis and sāmaṇerīs, at least to their face. But at the same time, it is not uncommon for Thai bhikkhunis and sāmaṇerīs to encounter discontented attitudes among a few village men or some of the monks who visit their temples. As several Thai people explained, some men feel that their dignity could be damaged if they are obliged to take a humble position and pay respect to a woman in robes. Their unwelcoming attitudes make the bhikkhunis and sāmaṇerīs feel unhappy and uncomfortable. Even though these attitudes are generally not very threatening, it is not easy for bhikkhunis and sāmaṇerīs to withstand the everyday slights and frequent offences they experience. Especially in a situation where a bhikkhuni or sāmaṇerī is the only woman who wears the yellow robes in a particular area, she must have a strong mind to cope with affronts all by herself. It is therefore understandable that, no matter how reasonable the grounds are for a woman to become a bhikkhuni or sāmaṇerī, and despite the fact that these religious identities offer high social status, few women dare to choose formal ordination.

**Relationship with Thai Monk Authorities**

It seems that the bhikkhuni movement is developing slowly, not because Thai people are not fully convinced by the logic and reasoning advanced by the movement, but rather because they are still carefully watching public reactions. Since the reintroduction of bhikkhuni ordination implies a demand for equal opportunities for women, it is not surprising that the movement is perceived as a claim of gender equality or even a challenge to the monks’ superiority. People are particularly concerned about how male Saṅgha members react to the bhikkhuni movement. Yet, over the past three years since Dhammananda’s sāmaṇerī ordination, the Thai Saṅgha has not made any public announcement, either to support or oppose the move of Thai Theravāda women toward taking the yellow robes.

In an interview, a senior monk indicated that the Saṅgha elders would not prevent Thai women from getting ordained in foreign countries, but they would not make any effort to assist their ordination, unless a woman who belongs to the royal family strongly insisted on being ordained by a Thai monk and became a part of the Thai Theravāda Saṅgha. He argued that, however sound the feminist rationale might be, elder
monks in Thailand do not want to listen to an argument that forces them to change their minds. Instead, the monk suggested that it was better for women to simply visit, bow respectfully, and request metta from the Sangha elders in order to better understand what is needed to improve Buddhist women’s status.

This monk’s remarks may be perceived as his sincere advice for Buddhist women, rather than an anti-egalitarian attitude on the part of someone at the top of the hierarchy. If a society inherits a traditionally hierarchical system, people who are traditionally educated learn to observe proprieties in accordance with seniority. When a junior person pays respect to someone who is senior, and when the senior person offers the junior compassion instead of imposing excessive authority, people regard their acts as virtuous and these relationships as harmonious. In such a hierarchically structured society, the topic of equality should be carefully and skillfully raised before those in superior positions.

In my experience in Thailand, Thai women who were born into privileged families often demonstrate sophisticated skills in dealing with gender issues. One good example was the late Mae chi Khunying Kanitha Wichiencharoen. She made great efforts to improve the status of Thai mae chis and worked diligently with the Department of Religious Affairs (and, through it, the Thai Saṅgha) to provide mae chis with the legislative status of renunciants. Although her life was too short to realize all her aims, through her leadership the issue of Thai mae chis’ status was more clearly understood, not only by Saṅgha elders, but more importantly by underprivileged mae chis themselves.

In the bhikkhuni movement, Dhammananda seems to take a similar approach. In accordance with the Vinaya, she requested a senior bhikkhu in her locality to preside and give the exhortation (ovata) at the bi-monthly pimokkha recitation conducted by her bhikkhuni congregation. By following the Vinaya rules and taking a humble position in relation to bhikkhus, Dhammananda seeks to achieve positive recognition from monks. By establishing this sort of friendly co-existence with local monks, women wearing the yellow robes will slowly be accepted as a part of the Thai landscape. Even though perfect gender equality will be quite difficult to achieve immediately, these Thai women’s efforts are a significant step toward the improvement of women’s status in Buddhism.

No tradition lasts forever. All traditions change over time and by the efforts of people, although we may never know when or by whom. Bringing about changes in traditional Thai norms involves not only questions of universal social justice, but also questions of interaction and negotiation with a hierarchically organized culture.

NOTES

1.  This paper was presented at the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, Seoul, Korea, held from June 27 to July 2, 2004.

2.  This aspect of international networking is also discussed in Tomomi Ito, “Women’s Rights, Ordination and Dhamma Practice: A Reflection on Recent Movements of Thai Buddhist Women,” WPB Review 41:1 (January-March 2004) 59-63.


Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women in Korea: Past and Present

Kwangwoo Sunim

In the Buddhist traditions, women and men are equally recognized and embraced as practitioners. The noble Buddha said, “Anyone can achieve liberation if he or she is dedicated to practicing. Women can attain enlightenment if they turn away from the world to tread the path of liberation.” The Buddha also believed that women and men were equally eligible for ordination. In the Buddhist texts, the Buddha predicts that bhikkhunis will attain enlightenment. In the Lotus Sūtra, the noble Buddha says to a bhikkhuni, “You will become a great Dharma teacher, teaching and helping many living beings. Then, you will become Buddha.”

Gender equality in the Buddha’s teachings was a revolutionary view in India, a country with a long tradition of the caste system. Clearly, this was more than a simple declaration of gender equality. The Buddha’s acceptance of ordained women practitioners and the establishment of the order of bhikkhunis (fully ordained nuns) meant the true realization of gender equality. During the Buddha’s lifetime, bhikkhunis assumed the same duties and functions as bhikkhus, and received respect and dignity as members of the Buddhist monastic order.

Buddhist texts show that there were great bhikkhunis throughout Buddhist history. For instance, the Therīgāthā, which was compiled at an early stage of Buddhist history, contains 522 verses recited by 93 venerable bhikkhunis who earned the title of arhat and were deeply respected. Arhats are those most worthy of honor and offerings. The Further Dialogues contain an episode in which the Buddha praised 50 bhikkhunis for their excellence in austerities, wisdom, supernormal powers, such as clairvoyance, the divine eye, and practice.

The practice and activities of bhikkhunis after the Buddha’s death spread throughout the world, along with the spread of Buddhism. In the third century BCE, Bhikkhu Sanghamitta, daughter of King Ashoka and younger sister of the elder Mahinda, removed a bodhi tree from Bodhgaya and replanted it at the Mahabodhi Temple in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. The tree is still alive, preserved as a symbol of Sri Lankan Buddhism. In addition, legend has it that in 4 BCE, a princess of southern India, who ran away from the Jains, secretly carried a tooth of the noble Buddha in her hair to Sri Lanka. The tooth is still preserved in a seven-layered golden box at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Sri Lanka. These are good examples that show a long history of active participation of bhikkhunis and Buddhist women in the South Asian region in the Theravāda tradition.

Unfortunately, however, now most bhikkhunis are concentrated in countries in East Asia where Mahāyāna Buddhism prevails. These countries include Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam. Bhikkhunis in these countries are actively engaged in teaching and practicing Dharma, and they receive respect and status equally with bhikkhus.
Korean Buddhist Women Historically

Despite its 1,600-year-old history, Korean Buddhism shows few records of activities by Buddhist women, especially bhikkhunis. This is mainly attributed to the male-oriented culture, which has dominated Korean society. Buddhadharma teaches that the basic principles of Buddhism originate from the equality of all living beings, in spite of which, men have dominated the history of humankind. Women practitioners are invariably disregarded in historic materials compiled in the era of Confucianism when the predominance of men over women was the norm.

However, bhikkhunis themselves should take a large part of the responsibility for this situation. Obviously, bhikkhunis themselves failed to be more active, initiative players in history. This is also part of the reason that we suspect either men or women would have been paragons in history if they had made more effort in attaining enlightenment, thoroughly pursuing their original objective of ordaining.

In fact, women’s embracing of Buddhism facilitated its spread in Korea at the early stage of its history. As a result, Buddhism became a religion which drew women since it gave them mental strength and relief. It transformed continuously throughout the Three Kingdoms period, the Unified Silla kingdom (57 BCE-935 CE), the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392 CE), and the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910 CE), taking on a variety of features according to the different eras. Accordingly, women’s status, roles and the manifestation of their faith in Buddhism changed significantly. It is said that women enjoyed the highest status in society during the Three Kingdoms period.

Indeed, I believe that it is meaningful to reflect on women’s role in Korean Buddhist history by tracing their footsteps, even though rare and poorly recorded in our extensive historical records. The bhikkhuni who has first appeared in historical records is a sister of Morye, a woman with the family name Sa. She helped the monk Ado, who introduced Buddhism to Silla, safely hide away. Other records point to a wife of King Beopheung of Silla as the first bhikkhuni in Korean Buddhism. She admired Sa and wanted to follow in her footsteps. She later built Youngheong Temple and left the palace and became a bhikkhuni also. Given the fact that she left the palace to become a bhikkhuni only eight years after Buddhism was officially accepted, it seems that the queen consort had considerable leeway at that time.

King Jinheong’s wife also became a bhikṣuṇī by the name of Bopun and lived in Youngheong Temple. Historical records show that the renunciation of the two queen consorts greatly affected women in the Silla Dynasty, leading many women to follow suit. These records give us a glimpse of the high status of bhikṣuṇī in the Silla Dynasty.

Moreover, in the 12th year of King Jinheong’s reign, the Dharma teacher Hyeryang from the Goguryeo Kingdom was appointed as “the teacher of the nation.” Bhikkhuni Ani was placed in the second highest position following him, taking charge of the bhikṣuṇī order. This is an important record, which demonstrates that there was a large enough number of bhikṣuṇīs to need a leader and they enjoyed a high status.

Baekje history also hints at an active role of bhikkhunis. For instance, King Widuck is said to have dispatched a bhikṣuṇī to Japan, along with instructors of Buddhist texts and practices, Zen masters, Bulgong and Sajang. In addition, the first three Japanese bhikkhunis, disciples of Hyepyun, a Goguryeo monk, came to Baekje and studied the vinaya for three years. Japanese Buddhism is estimated to originate from these three bhikkhunis - Sunshin, Sunjang and Hyesun. In the 15th year of King Uija’s reign (655 CE), Bhikṣuṇī Bopyong went to Japan and treated sick people by reciting the Vimalakīrti Sūtra.

In the Goryeo Dynasty, it seems that Buddhism was part of the life of women, rather than a noble religion. We can judge how it manifested in their lives by taking a look at the titles of epitaphs belonging to upper class women. Generally, women in the Goryeo Dynasty became familiar with Buddhism from their early childhood, embracing it as part of daily lives.

Buddhist women memorized and recited Buddhadharma in the morning. After working in the fields in
the daytime, they recited Buddhadharma again at night. During that time, people believed that one could realize what he or she wished if he or she memorized and recited the Buddhadharma, copied texts, and offered them to the Buddha. The most popular texts among women were Diamond Sūtra, Flower Garland Sūtra, Amitabha Sūtra, and Thousand Eyes and Hands Sūtra, which emphasize compassion and generosity to others and teach the basic principles of religious practice, providing hope that a devoted practitioner would lead a happy life in ultimate bliss.

During that time, laywomen made offerings to temples and some renounced mundane life to become bhikkunis. Generally, they donated money and items needed to build temples, statues of the Buddha, and stūpas. There were also large-scale donors who donated money for building new temples and financed their operating expenses. Given the fact that women were not allowed to participate in economic and social activities at that time, women’s donations were possible thanks to the inheritance system of the Goryeo Dynasty in which women were eligible to receive an equal portion of inheritance with men. Slaves were offered to temples and in extreme cases, poor people sent their children, which was a way of offering labor.

During the Goryeo Dynasty, women made a spiritual contribution to Buddhism by grooming their children as Buddhist monks. Housewives left home to become bhikkunis after their children became monks. In many cases, women opted to become Buddhist nuns after their husbands died or in order to escape from poverty. Some were forced to renounce the mundane world as a punishment for misbehavior. The Goryeo Dynasty also produced many nuns who came from royal families and lived a monastic life at Jongop-won, a bhikkuni temple built in the 38th year of King Gojong’s reign as a residence for nuns within the capital city.

As we have seen, it was quite common in the Goryeo Dynasty for women to renounce the mundane world to become bhikkunis, regardless of their social status. Although Buddhist theology and a variety of Buddhist sects thrived in the Goryeo Dynasty, most historical records of that time regarding bhikkunis are rather disheartening. For example, as an excessively large number of temples became a serious social issue, King Hyeonjong, in the eighth year of his reign, imposed a ban on giving away houses and lands to temples and on leaving home to be ordained. In the fourteenth year of King Chungryul’s reign, a princess of the Yuan Dynasty who had married King Chungryul had frequent personal contact with bhikkunis, calling them into her room to ask about the world outside the palace. Some bhikkunis had high quality ramie cloth woven as a gift for the princess. An appeal letter written by Jo In-oak in the first year of King Chang’s reign well demonstrates the discrimination and oppression against women and bhikkunis. The letter reads, “Any woman, whether noble or not, is prohibited from going to a temple under any circumstances, including the death of parents. Violators will be gravely punished, and servants belonging to local officials are prohibited from becoming monks or nuns....” In the third year of King Gongyang’s reign, even ordinary women and housewives were prohibited from visiting temples.

As the Joseon Dynasty adopted Confucianism as its ruling ideology, Buddhism began to lose its political and social influence. A policy of oppressing Buddhism while promoting Confucianism presented a critical challenge to the very existence of Buddhism. Despite the oppression of Buddhism, women still preferred it to Confucianism, looking for relief and salvation in it. Women’s unwavering faith in Buddhism was the very foundation of Joseon-era Buddhism, which had retreated into the mountains. Women continued to take part in Buddhist activities and events despite the systematic persecution and oppression. After he took office, King Taejong once expressed concern about women’s strong faith in Buddhism, saying, “I have already abolished all Buddhist rituals arranged by the government. Still, lamentably, women in the royal family are willing to pay to arrange chanting, precept ceremonies, and ritual services to appease ghosts, praying for their sons long life. Nothing can stop them....” This is clear evidence that Buddhism remained a dominant religious force among Joseon women. King Sejong, in the eleventh year of his reign, banned girls and housewives from visiting temples and Buddhist monks from visiting widows’ places. Generally speaking, however, kings in the early years of the Joseon Dynasty did not take extreme measures to oppress Buddhism. Rather, they employed a carrot and stick policy to contain it.
In particular, enthusiasm for Buddhism among women in the royal family was noteworthy. For instance, Queen Insu wrote an official letter in which she expressed her support for Buddhism. She said in the letter, “Preceding kings wanted to ostracize Buddhism but did not because they were worried it might stir up grievances and complaints at the grassroots level.” Her arguments were not fully accepted, but they led to a tacit tolerance of Buddhism. With a strong commitment to reviving Buddhism, Queen Consort Munjong of the King Myoungjong era made policy efforts, such as reintroducing a civil service examination system for Buddhist monks and restoring dilapidated temples. Unfortunately, the renaissance of Buddhism did not continue after the death of Queen Consort Munjong, but her efforts were not futile. Chunghuhuejong, known as Master Seosan, is one of the most renowned Joseon monks, who passed the civil service examination system for Buddhist monks and contributed to keeping the tradition alive.

We can see Korean Buddhist women's strong faith followed in the footsteps of the women of the royal family who gave strong public support for Buddhism and always encouraged its revival at a time when Confucian scholars did not tolerate anything related to Buddhism. Unlike the noble women, however, ordinary women's religious activities were limited to activities such as giving food and money to mendicants, visiting temples, and giving offerings to the noble Buddha to pray for good health and the well-being of their families. These limitations were attributed to the oppressive social atmosphere against Buddhism during that time, when Buddhist monks were prohibited from entering the capital city.

Korean Buddhist Women Today

As we have seen so far, women are the very source of life and strength in the history of Korean Buddhism. And this strength is closely related to the unique reality of Korean Buddhism. Today, women make up the majority of the Buddhist population in Korea, accounting for 70 to 80 percent of the total ordained and lay populations. Bhikkhunis represent more than half of the Jogye order, Korea's leading Buddhist order.

Furthermore, Buddhist women are playing increasingly important roles in society, as well as within the Buddhist order. In particular, bhikkhunis’ activities are becoming more extensive in the areas of Dharma practice and teaching. They dedicate themselves to study and meditation practice in lecture halls and meditation halls across the country. Recently, a growing number of bhikkhunis are participating in research and publishing, both at home and abroad. It is a massive change for Korean Buddhist women, given the fact that until recently, bhikkhunis were not even allowed to teach from the podium of temples, because of the eight special rules for nuns. However, now many bhikkhunis with Ph.D.s teach bhikkhus in colleges!

These encouraging changes are the fruits of bhikkhunis’ endeavors and self-reflection. They thoroughly reflected on their past and present, from the Joseon Dynasty, the dark age, until today. It was a move of “back to basics.” They admitted their regrettable past in which they remained dependent and blindly obedient, accepting their position as a social custom they had to follow. This is an example of the true practice of “engaged Buddhism in society.”

There are many other cases that show bhikkhunis’ active participation and admirable accomplishments both in meditation and education. For example, the Soen school led by Venerable Mangong Sunim produced woman Soen masters such as Bhikkhuni Beophee Sunim and Manseong Sunim during Japanese colonial rule. More than ten bhikkhunis successfully completed the full academic courses at Kwanum Lecture Hall at Namjang Temple in Sangju, with the help of the visionary Hyebong Sunim; in this way a new vitality was brought to the Korean bhikkuni order. It is a great honor and pride to the Korean bhikkuni order that it produced the three greatest bhikkhunis in modern history, Geumryong, Hyeoak, and Suoak Sunim.

Moreover, bhikkhunis made a great contribution to “the movement for purification of Buddhist orders” during the conflict between bhikkhus and married monks in the 1950s. Until then, bhikkhus (unmarried fully ordained monks) were few in number, whereas most Buddhist nuns were bhikkhunis (unmarried fully ordained nuns). After taking over the temples from the married monks, bhikkhunis replaced them as heads
of temples and renovated the old, dilapidated facilities, laying the foundation for today’s thriving Buddhism.

This is only part of the story. More than 30 meditation halls for bhikkhunis were restored or opened across the country, including Gyunsung Monastery, Naewon Temple, Naewon Monastery, Daesung Monastery, Daewon Temple, Boduck Temple, Bohyun Monastery, Budo Monastery, Bulyong Temple, Samsun Monastery, Seoknam Temple, Yaksoo Monastery, Yoonpil Monastery, Jijang Monastery, and Hwaun Temple. Many lecture halls for bhikkhunis were opened, such as Donghak Temple, Unmoon Temple, Chungam Temple, Bongryung Temple, and Samseon Sangha University, and produced a large number of bhikkhunis. Moreover, bhikkhunis have become bodhisattvas of compassion in society, putting the teaching of the noble Buddha into practice in a variety of fields, such as social welfare and culture.

Meanwhile, laywomen have played an important role as well. They actively took part in a campaign to settle the national debt with Japan in the early 20th century. The Josoen Buddhist Women's Group ran Nung-in Women's College and took the lead to teach women during Japan’s colonial rule. Their initiative and enterprising spirit is still alive today. For instance, the launch of the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute was the very symbol of laywomen’s unshakable status in Korean Buddhism and a reflection of their efforts to make contributions to Buddhism and to society. Now, a growing number of laywomen participate in a variety of activities ranging from managing temples to textual study, meditation, chanting and reciting mantras, social service and Buddhist cultural activities. This is a very encouraging trend. Furthermore, it is desirable that more and more laywomen show strong intellectual aspirations to systematically study Buddhhadharma. We are very proud of the progress made by Korean Buddhist women.

A brief look at the 1,600 years of Korean Buddhist history reveals that Korean Buddhism has greatly contributed to building Korea’s brilliant and rich culture, with its long tradition and spirit of “saving the nation and serving the people.” Korean Buddhism survived 500 years of oppression in the Joseon Dynasty and developed into what it is today, keeping its spirit and mission alive. Here, once again, Buddhist women have been significant, though often unrecognized, contributors to this historic achievement.

Building on past achievements, the Korean Bhikkhuni Association opened the National Bhikkhuni Assembly Hall, its long-cherished dream. The world Buddhist community was surprised to see that the Korean bhikkhuni order was able to build a center for the Buddhist women’s movement. The National Bhikkhuni Assembly Hall, which opened on August 19, 2003, is the fruit of strenuous efforts by bhikkhunis who organized the Udumbara Bhikkhuni Assembly in 1968 and declared three principles – establishing monastic teaching centers, teaching Dharma, and building a more compassionate society.

After going through many difficulties and hardships, bhikkhunis built the National Bhikkhuni Assembly Hall as a way to realize the noble Buddha’s teaching, “seeking enlightenment while teaching and serving all living beings.” In this regard, the National Bhikkhuni Assembly Hall symbolizes the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss (sukhavati), the Buddha’s flower garden (samādhi), and a lotus pond. When the Buddha asked the bhikkhunis to spread and edify the Dharma, he apparently believed in the potential of bhikkhunis to embrace and lead all living beings in compassion.

The true meaning and role of the National Bhikkhuni Assembly Hall is in practicing the noble Buddha’s teachings. No doubt, this new institution will produce a great number of talented Buddhists who will lead in this rapidly changing era of technology. Buddhist laywomen and nuns are more numerous now than ever before and embody the vitality of Korean Buddhism. They will serve as guides, suggesting how to put the Buddha’s teachings into practice and how to spread the Buddha’s teachings. Moreover, they will pursue “engaged Buddhism in society” that equally emphasizes education, propagation, and social welfare. Thus, they will actively participate in building an inclusive and compassionate society in which all members, including the disabled and elderly, live in harmony. Eventually, they will play a critical role in further developing Korean Buddhism in this time of globalization, greatly contributing to world peace and human development.
The Art of Self-Cultivation

Malia Dominica Wong

With the wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
Until the attainment of full enlightenment.

Filled with compassion and wisdom,
Today in the Buddha’s presence
I generate the mind of enlightenment
For the benefit of all sentient beings.

As long as space endures,
And as long as sentient beings remain,
May I too remain, until then,
To dispel the miseries of the world.

One night, after a long trip away, I called my friend at the temple to let her know I had returned. I had missed her and the temple dearly. To my surprise, however, after saying “Hello,” she asked me what I wanted. I responded, “I just wanted to say hello.” Her voice expressed a little agitation as she said, “You called to tell me just that? I was in practice. You have disturbed my practice. You should be in practice too.” I sheepishly offered a “Thank you” for the reminder and hung up the phone, admonishing myself for giving in to human feelings. Yes, I should have known, shiou xing.

Shiou xing is the Chinese term for the “practice of Buddhism.” It is the study of the sūtras, recitation of prayers, contemplation on the Dharma, chanting of the Buddha’s name, or involvement in a number of other, as we say in the West, “spiritual practices.” Over the past 25 years as a nun, I have observed ways in which “nuns of the West” engage heavily in the practice of Christianity, and yet, can also remain so far from hitting the bull’s eye of the fullness of what practice should encompass. What do I mean? Shiou xing is to become perfect, to break beyond that which inhibits the mind coming into enlightenment. When Catholic nuns engage in shiou (“fixing”), sometimes it is more a limited ego journey. As Catholic nuns, we strive to become perfect, as Christ was perfect. Yet many times our actions do not match our mind-state. We may know the practice intellectually, but we have not yet mastered our response in compassionate action. Imagine a parallel experience: A distressed visitor comes to the convent door and needs to talk, and a nun says, “I can’t help you now, it is prayer time.”
Let us pause for a moment. I invite you to close your eyes and imagine yourself in a beautiful garden. In this garden, there are rocks and trees, maybe even a stream or a waterfall. Picture the lushness of the garden, the vibrant shades of green, yellow and brown, and the rainbow of other colors around. Feel the coolness of the air, and sense its deep peace. Now look down in your hands. Imagine yourself carrying a precious tree. Is it a tall tree or a short tree? A thin one or a full one? Is it an elderly tree or a young one? Where in this immense garden should you put this tree? How can you find out where it belongs? Relax. Put the tree down. Take a seat before your tree and project your mind into it. Slowly, learn to be one with it. Sense its rhythm, its expanse, what it has been offering, and what it has to offer a different space. Coming to know it intimately, you will then know where it will best be in harmony in itself and with its surroundings. Take a moment and become the tree.

In Chinese, aside from the term *shiou xing*, there is also the term *shiou yang*. Although I have not heard this term mentioned as often as *shiou xing*, I believe *shiou yang* is equally important, for it means “training, mastery, self-cultivation.” And it is with this that I offer the simple Taoist exercise of “becoming a tree,” so that our practice in Buddhism and Christianity may be made more perfect through our practice in self-cultivation.

What is the art of self-cultivation? It is to cultivate the heart of the world, for the world. This is the heart that embraces and meets the miseries of the world. It is the heart that endures and transforms beyond systems, rules, protocols (even beyond our rites, rituals, and practices). Upon entering religious life, I entered upon a way of life emphasizing sublimation of the body. In the quest for union with God, we were taught different practices of denial and subjected to various trials. As a novice on the path, I did not know that these were means to help us cultivate ourselves in humility and overcome body/mind to achieve transcendence. As I grew older however, I realized that “crazy wisdom” is not necessarily a sign of enlightenment. Of my group of 26, 15 members have left the convent. Some needed psychological counseling. Others, to this day, have remained, but are more stoic than real in compassionate action. What should have been cultivated instead was true knowledge, honesty, courage, joy, and passion for service.

Entering upon the path of Buddhism, I found clear procedures to cut through my monkey mind by sharpening my controlling faculties. Meditation practice taught me to note each thing that occurs, give it a silent label, and then to note what happens to it. Through the reading of Buddhist texts, I learned “how” to apply the Christian Bible in my own life on deeper levels of consciousness. For example, in the Bible there is the story of a man who got beaten, robbed, and left on the wayside to die. A number of people, even a priest, passed him by without rendering assistance. It was only the good Samaritan that stopped to give aid and took the man on his own donkey to an inn where he paid the innkeeper to nurture the man back to health. In the Church, we often use this story to teach others of love through unconditional caring for each other.

However, for me it wasn’t enough. Running across the eightfold path of right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration, I felt I was offered a more tangible checklist for growing in love. Even the Recollection of the Ten Perfecting Qualities (*dasa pāramī*) seemed to give more vocabulary for my mind.

May I be generous and helpful! (*dāna pāramī*)
May I be pure, virtuous and well-disciplined! (*sīla pāramī*)
May I not be selfish and self-possessive, but selfless and self-sacrificing! (*nekkhamma pāramī*)
May I be wise and be able to give the benefit of my knowledge to others! (*pañña pāramī*)
May I be strenuous, energetic and persevering! (*vīra parāmi*)
May I be patient! May I be able to bear and forbear the wrong of others! (*khanti pāramī*)
May I be honest and truthful! (*sacca pāramī*)
May I be firm and resolute! (*adhitthana pāramī*)
May I be kind, compassionate and friendly! (*metta pāramī*)
May I be humble, calm, quiet, unruffled, and serene! (*upekkha pāramī*)
May I serve to be perfect; may I be perfect to serve!²

However, even this is not enough. We need to *shiou yang*, put it into practice. Perhaps you can think of another nun who sometimes just drives you crazy or one who keeps you in fear. Is there someone you're not talking to now or are avoiding? As nuns, we are to respect and follow every word of the nuns who entered before us, even if they are wrong, less than tactful, going through mood swings, or not exemplary.

I have been the superior of my convent for six years now. I have also served in monastic administration for 12 years. But, even though a nun may be my elder, I hold her (and myself as well) responsible for any actions that may not be loving and kind. In the Christian tradition, too, there are scandalous religious practitioners who do not edify others, but actually cause embarrassment to the Christian community. There are some nuns who enter the convent to escape household responsibilities or the world, and practice only with their mind and not their heart. Allow me to illustrate through a fable the necessity of *shiou yang*, the practice of self-cultivation in order to free all sentient beings.

Once upon a time, there were a dog and a chicken who were entrusted with the care of overseeing the household, while the master tiger was away. Dog and Chicken had a friend named Ox, who came over and visited them quite a bit. Little did they know that Ox really admired them and hoped one day to be able to join their *saṅgha*. Dog, Chicken, and Ox did many things together, such as tending to the garden, playing in the kitchen, cleaning the sacred space, and eating with each other. They also regularly made it a point to pray together. Dog provided its steadfast “whoof, whoof.” Chicken added to the chanting with its proud and high pitched “brock, brock.” And Ox chimed in with its heartfelt and lowly “moomph, moomph.” “I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and *saṅgha*.”

One day Dog fell very ill. Because the other animals knew that Chicken often argued very loudly with the peace-keeping Dog, they decided to call in Ox to watch their beloved. Ox quietly moved in and did all it could to attend to Dog’s needs, especially to be alert during the evenings in case Dog took a turn for the worse. Time went by, and Dog did turn for the worse. The other animals followed protocol and told Chicken, as the next in line of succession, that it must do something about getting Dog to a hospital. Ox stepped back and observed. Ox also, however, contacted all of its friends who agreed to be available if Dog needed more assistance.

Dog went to the hospital. Ox’s friends took care of Dog. Chicken’s friends chickened out. After Dog went home, Ox noticed a cold shoulder from Chicken and a number of Chicken’s friends. Ox could not understand why. Dog wanted Ox to stay, but Chicken didn’t. Ox went away. Ox tried to remain faithful and kept on visiting, bringing nourishment and just wanting to see Dog again. However, Chicken and its friends would not let Ox in. Master Tiger finally came home, and Chicken was scolded for fighting with Dog so much, and Ox was scolded for interfering with *sangha* affairs. Ox tried to speak to Master Tiger to create a better understanding of the situation However, Master Tiger said that all was said and done.

A year passed and Ox ran into Master Tiger again, but Master Tiger (who used to be friendly and was someone Ox hoped to train with one day) would not entertain any conversation. Great confusion. Ox could not understand how they could be so unkind, not reaching out, so “un-Buddhist.” Ox envisioned the thousand arms of Guanyin and the heart of the Buddha going beyond themselves to befriend and forgive everyone. Ox bowed, left that which Ox had loved, and moved on.

What is the moral of this fable? Sometimes our actions may not match our practice and because of this we may be harming others more than helping them to grow in the Buddha’s or Christ’s ways. There is no blame. Stop. Pause. Breathe. Sit back. Become a tree. Become the other person. Become you. Sit back and slowly learn to be one with the tree/yourself/another. Sense its rhythm, its expanse, what it has been offering
and what it has to offer a different space/situation. By coming to know it/self/other intimately, you will then know where you will best be in harmony in yourself and with your surroundings. You will be able, knowing yourself, to benefit all sentient beings.

Like the man who got robbed and was left for dead on the roadside, it was the priest who passed him by; like the nun who could not be disturbed because she was in prayer, like Ox who was not understood because its sole aim was to get Dog assistance and broke protocol in doing so... How many times have we failed to value compassionate action over our institutional roles? How do we get “filled with compassion and wisdom...generate the mind of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings?”

My uncle was in hospice for over a month. In-between my busy schedule, I made it a point to be with him and the family at least every other day. I could have said, “I’m praying for you” and not gone over. But experience has shown me that putting my good intentions into physical action is more of the bodhisattva way I have chosen to cultivate and live. In conclusion, I offer the following parameters for our growth in becoming full trees of enlightenment, shade, wisdom, and respite for others, lest my practice be empty and I, nothing.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues,
but do not have love,
I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.
And if I have the gift of prophecy,
and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;
If I have all faith as to move mountains,
but do not have love,
I am nothing.
If I give away everything I own,
and if I hand over my body so that I may boast,
but do not have love, I gain nothing.
Love is patient. Love is kind...
It is not jealous, (Love) is not pompous,
it is not inflated, it is not rude,
it does not seek its own interests,
it is not quick-tempered,
it does not brood over injury,
it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.\(^3\)

**NOTES**

1. This prayer is known as “generating the mind of enlightenment (bodhicitta).” http://tibetancc.com/events/gen_bodhicitta1996.php
3. 1 Cor. 13:7.
Buddhist Monastic Training
Basic Training for Korean Buddhist Nuns

Iljin Sunim

Teaching those with a firm determination to learn is very important in religious education, just like any other education. Such students are ready to either accept new facts or raise doubts about them, and are open to every possibility. They can see things as they are and gradually, or sometimes even instantly, realize the genuine characteristics of every object. For this reason, as stated in the *Garland of the Buddhas Sūtra*, the first determination for enlightenment is the moment that you are enlightened. In other words, only when good introductory education is guaranteed, one can expect to bear fruits. This article discusses the basic training process for Korean Buddhist nuns as it is carried out today in the Sangha University of Unmun Temple. It is based on the Sangha education provided in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism’s institutions and my 30 years of experience as a student as well as a teacher.

Training **Heangja** (Aspirants)

The candidates for the basic training process are called *haengja*, or aspirants. These are people who resolve to join their predecessors in leaving behind their family and renouncing all secular life for a sublime ideal. Their motives may differ depending on the circumstances that each candidate faces, but they have in common the strong desire to start a new life after abandoning mundane pursuits. It is natural, therefore, for the emotionally fragile *haengja*, placed in an unfamiliar environment, to respond sensitively to and be influenced by her predecessors.

Regardless of time and place, all novices agonize, drift emotionally, engage in self-exploration and even self-accusation, and eventually get accustomed to their circumstances during the training process. They are like a white cloth subjected to a process of dyeing with the “colors” of the existing institutions and ethos. This is referred to as “being dyed in Buddhism.”

These aspirants will form the future religious body and it will fall to them to take responsibility for shaping the future of Buddhism in Korea. In this context, the future of Korea’s Buddhism will be threatened if the new aspirants who practice the virtue of humility (*hasim*) are regarded as mere assistants doing trivial chores in the monastery. For this reason, when accepting aspirants, strict and thorough standards are applied to evaluate their personalities and qualifications, since the training eventually leads to *bhikkhuni* ordination.

Nowadays, the situation has changed a lot compared with the period of the 1970s when I first joined the monastery. Today’s aspirants must go through various stages of an evaluation process ranging from physical tests to written tests that assess their mental and physical capacity as well as their knowledge of Buddhism. Those who pass the test will repeatedly ponder over the lesson of “the first determination for enlightenment is the moment when you are enlightened,” and renew their commitment every moment, day after day.

The training is given according to the circumstances of each aspirant. The education covers Buddhist ceremonies, self-awareness of the initial motivation, the novice precepts (the ten training rules of the
ordained Buddhist order, the 24 moral precepts), and the basic Buddhist philosophical concepts, which is the fundamental discipline for living and is therefore common knowledge for all novices.

Kangwon (Ordained Sangha University) Education

A śrāmanerikā (samini) is a female novice who has completed at least a year in the temple and taken the initial ordination, in which she receives the first set of precepts or ten training rules known as the “Tenfold Rules of Purity.” After being taught the basic rules and practices for a couple of years, a novice will normally enter a Saṅgha university, a mandatory educational institution that offers basic training. Without doubt, the admission procedure is carried out strictly in that all the applicants must fulfill the requirements, ranging from the screening of relevant documents to interviews and written tests.

All practitioners must train hard to generate an aspiration for enlightenment, as the aspiration sustains the enthusiasm for seeking enlightenment and represents compassion itself. Therefore, it is as important to train the students to generate this intrinsic altruistic aspiration in seeking enlightenment as it is to provide them with the learning and training environment to do so. What practitioners learn and practice in the monastery will confirm their initial determination and passion for enlightenment. Furthermore, it will provide a strong fundamental energy that can be tapped into throughout the journey toward enlightenment.

The training focuses on teaching the three inseparable aspects of practicing Buddhism: (1) cultivating ethical purity; (2) training the mind, mental clarity, and meditative stabilization; and (3) training in wisdom, understanding, explanation, conduct, and realization. The purpose of the training is to help students realize the three bodies of Buddha: thinking, speech, and action. When the students have been trained to have disciplined attitudes, speech, and behavior while walking, standing, sitting, and lying-down, these factors will be the means to realize the Dharma teachings. In addition, students must focus on carrying out their daily lives in accordance with the values and philosophy they pursue.

These days most applicants have received higher education and tend to tilt more towards ideals and theory. That is why one of the goals of training is to teach students how to strike a balance between theory and practice. Also, the training is aimed at teaching students so that they can realize that theory is important only when it can be applied and practiced correctly in daily life.

The Daily Training Process

The students’ day starts with reviewing their behavior in what is called a repentance ceremony. Students pay respect to the Buddha to get his help in getting rid of their old mundane habits and ignorance. The repentance ceremony is significant in that one of the objectives of the training is to elimination the practitioners’ bad habits and be renewed. What needs changing and how to change it varies from individual to individual, and one can opt for personal meditation as a way to repent.

At a communal place like Unmun Temple, however, the form of the repentance ceremony is that all practitioners bow 108 times after chanting at dawn. Bowing represents one’s respect and submission toward the true Buddha nature and the determination to fight off afflictive emotions and ignorance. After the repentance ceremony comes a time to recite a sūtra, where the novices in their first year of training – in the Śrāmanerikā Department – study discipline, a preliminary course to their second year of training. The practitioners develop their bodies and minds by learning the detailed etiquette and wording of the recorded discipline.

Students of the current generation who are not accustomed to Chinese characters may feel overwhelmed when learning chimun, since it mainly contains advice about precepts and the essential instructions given by Chinese teachers of the past, all written in Chinese characters. The same problem applies to all students from the first year to the fourth.
Students learn *chimun* in their first year and other subjects, like the history of Indian Buddhism and introduction to Buddhism, to have a comprehensive, overall understanding of the Buddhist tradition. In their first year, Buddhist novices are in charge of chores like tidying the temple grounds and preparing some of the food for the community.

In their second year, students study the doctrines of the founders of the various Buddhist schools by reading them repeatedly to understand the true meaning of the words. In addition, they reflect on themselves through meditation and other practices. During this period, they also learn the history of Chinese Buddhism and the Abhidharma (higher philosophical) teachings. For a year, they also take charge of planting vegetables, which are just as important to the community as rice. In every process of cultivation, from sowing the seeds and weeding to applying fertilizer, students spiritually cultivate their minds. In reality, they realize how much they are profoundly indebted to lay devotees who offer them the necessities of life.

In the third year, juniors learn *sūtras* first-hand and accumulated knowledge of the legal code of great teachers and Chinese characters. It could be considered quite an achievement to digest so much material in a single year. Nonetheless, the students learn the *Sūtra of the Heroic Ones*, *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, *Perfection of Wisdom in Three Hundred Lines*, and *Complete Enlightenment Sūtra* one after the other and also the *History of Korean Buddhism*, plus the *Mind-Only Discourse*.

Along with learning those subjects, one of the mandatory courses is serving the community by preparing daily meals. Ranging from planning the diet to cooking new dishes, they sincerely fulfill their duties to serve others. Once a week they prepare special foods and other healthy and nutritious dishes for the young practitioners. It is true that they spend more time preparing the food than studying, but this teaches them that kitchen work never ends in mundane life. Preparing and eating food is a cycle that never ends, which is symbolic of cyclic existence.

It is interesting to note that the food preferences of students change with the culture of temple life. Even so, students pay keen attention to preserving and caring for traditional foods as well as discussing ways to effectively dispose of leftovers, ways of eating effectively and moderately, and methods of protecting the environment. They faithfully serve the community by preparing meals that are easy to digest, fresh, and pure, abiding by the established rules and principles of food preparation.

In the final year of training, seniors take a course in the Great Teachings. The word Great Teachings refers to the *Garland of Buddhas Sūtra*. Seniors graduate after completing this course. The final year can be considered the most stable year, because it is built upon the challenges and rewards of the previous three years. Although each individual feels differently in their final stage of training, physically they will have more free time than in the past years and more room to manage their own time.

Normally students learn the 80 books of the *Garland of Buddhas Sūtra* and its introduction in their fourth year. When it comes to taking a course in copying *Sūtras*, the students learn perseverance. Learning the *sūtras* based on the courses set in the Kangwon clearly demonstrates the unique characteristics of Korean Buddhism.

To sum it all up, although practice takes precedence over theory, students are clearly taught that learning the theory is just as important as practice. Korean Buddhism has its theoretical background in the philosophy of pure wisdom and mental cultivation and the oneness of teachings and meditation.

From the first year to the fourth, students encounter the broad concepts set down in the *Garland of Buddhas Sūtra*. By learning this *sūtra*, they are constantly trained to put the theory into practice. During this period, their common duty is to lead the community by being given disciplinary positions. They assume important roles in the community, such as clerical duties and doing the accounts. Externally, they take charge of the Cultural Department and the Enlightenment Department, promote their education centers, and run the institution’s website.

With a sense of pride and obligation, seniors patrol the temple grounds and the mountain areas and take care of visitors to Unmun Temple by offering them a tour around the temple. Internally and externally, they
faithfully perform their duties as seniors and prepare for graduation.

In addition to the courses that I have mentioned, an additional duty that all practitioners must take up at least once during their four years of training is the role of teacher. In a large hall with all practitioners present, everybody takes turns acting as the teacher. Each of them gives a presentation on their daily lives and others have time to reflect on themselves. While one person is in charge, others recite the precepts together and share their confessions. This procedure is described in the Sūtra of the Heroic Ones and dates back to the time of the Buddha, when, at the end of the summer training period, he gathered all his disciples together to reflect on the training.

During their fourth year, students have a chance to help the less fortunate by going on an almsround to collect money. In addition, they go on a pilgrimage to Indian temples and other places to forge strong ties of friendship and unity among themselves. Finally they are completing their training and on the path to graduation.

During the four-year training, the Kangwon, like any other temple, provides students with conditions to perform individual practice. Externally, students learn to be committed to enlightening others based on the true Dharma. There are four more institutions like Unmun Temple that provide training to aspirants and each offers training that showcases their regional and traditional characteristics.

Further Education after Graduation

After completing the Kangwon, some graduates enter a Seon monastery, but not all of them do so. It is mandatory to receive education in a Kangwon, but after the practitioners are fully ordained, individuals will decide whether to receive further training by considering their circumstances. Those who are interested in teaching can apply to Dongguk University and other universities or graduate schools. Large number of graduates choose to study abroad in India or China, and others decide to dedicate themselves to teaching Buddhism.

There are 34 Seon (Zen) centers for bhikkunīs in Korea, and about 950 bhikkunīs practice there. Unlike in the Kangwon, there are no designated textbooks or teachers in Zen centers. Those who are determined to carry on studying will continue to train themselves based on the sūtras and the founders’ words that they have learned in the Kangwon. With firm commitment and perseverance, they participate in a three-month practice session twice a year.

To close, I would like to quote the Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom (Chinese: Ta-chib-tu-lun, Skt.: Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śastra):

> The mind of a Buddha gives happiness to unenlightened beings and the mind of great compassion relieves their sufferings. The former presents causal conditions for joy and pleasure, while the latter offers relief from separation and pain. With joy, unenlightened beings pursue happiness and, with compassion, they are liberated from suffering.

Based on this quotation, compassion could be equated with love and sympathy. I believe love will truly be realized when one gets rid of selfishness and greed and that compassion will genuinely be exerted when one overcomes anger. Compassion in Buddhism means sharing one’s life with others by giving happiness and eliminating suffering. True compassion, however, is selflessness. Therefore, we realize that the essence of Buddhism is the philosophy of emptiness.

We need to bear in mind that the Buddha’s vow to attain enlightenment, to save suffering beings, and to edify others has deep roots in realizing compassion. In this context, the fundamental structure for the basic training of bhikkhuni must be in line with this philosophy. Without applying compassion in the training of
aspirants, genuine training would be hard to come by. That is why compassion is the key to training and also addressing the various difficult issues of these rapidly changing times.

The genuine practice of wisdom and compassion, which are the two main pillars of Buddhist philosophy, is what the training of Buddhist nuns is all about. They are also the significant elements that have brought us together at this place. Practicing the philosophy of wisdom and compassion is the purest dedication of merit.
Bodhisattva Kšitigarbha and Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Taiwanese Bhikṣuṇī

Yuchen Li

Two biographies of Taiwanese bhikṣuṇīs were published in 2002, Fāyan (The Banquet of Dharma) by Ven. Jingding and Dizang Pusa yu wo (The Relation between Dizang Bodhisattva and Me) by Ven. Dijiao. In Taiwan, Dizang Bodhisattva (Sanskrit: Kšitigarbha, Japanese: Jizō) has traditionally been associated with the salvation of creatures suffering in hell. The writers of these two memoirs described their religious initiations, master-disciple relations, and devotion to the worship of Dizang Bodhisattva. They became famous in the 1990s and established their communities, ranging from two to five nunneries. To a great extent, these two autobiographies provide a panoramic view of the religious career of Taiwanese nuns. Since many nuns of the past left no record of their lives, it is extremely difficult to understand the general life cycle of Taiwanese nuns. Venerable Zhengyan, the founder of Ciji Buddhist Relief Foundation, is an unusual case. Thus, these two books may shed light on the religious life and career development of Taiwanese nuns after World War II.

In 2001, Marc Moskowitz published an interesting book titled, The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan, about the changing nature of Dizang belief in contemporary Taiwan. He argues that the worship of aborted fetuses was introduced from Japanese Buddhism in the 1970s, and has become a prosperous business for Taiwanese spirit mediums. In other words, syncretic relationship between Buddhism and folk religion involving Dizang has emerged. Focusing on the practice of spirit mediums, Moskowitz does not pay much attention to Taiwanese Buddhism.

This article has three aims. First, it introduces the Bhikṣuṇīs Jingding and Dijiao and their promotion of Dizang belief. Second, it offers a Buddhist perspective on the current transformation of Dizang belief. Third, and most importantly, it seeks to reconstruct and understand the religious path of contemporary Taiwan nuns.

The Life Story of Bhikṣuṇī Jingding

Like many poor women who benefit from religious education, Jingding was initially attracted to Buddhist education. Born in a poor family in southwestern city in 1958, Jingding dropped out of junior high school at the age of 15 to work at a factory to improve the family income. Pursing her pious mother’s religious faith, Jingding took refuge under Bhikṣu Sengmiao and entered his Zhuxi Buddhist Institute three years later. At first, she told her family that it was the only chance for her to continue her education and she would not receive the tonsure at the nunnery. However, she changed her mind and received full ordination in 1963, at the age 20, along with most of her classmates. After ordination, Jingding served at the monastic kitchen for one year. By fulfilling this customary duty to her master’s temple, Jingding then got a chance to study
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At the newly opened Buddhist Zhengjue Institute. During this period, she participated in a summer retreat led by Bhikṣu Jingnian and worked as his Taiwanese translator. During this period, she participated the summer retreat led by Bhikṣu Jingnian and worked as his Taiwanese translator. Meanwhile, Jingding also met Bhikṣuṇī Dawu and began their lifelong friendship. Many Taiwanese nuns form friendships like these and begin their careers together.

Through the introduction of Dawu, Jingding stayed at Yongquan Monastery and audited some Buddhist courses at the university with Dawu. However, Jingding became very ill from 1967 to 1971 and embarked on a retreat in an apartment in Taipei. Dawu took care of her in those days. After she recovered her health, Jingding began to teach laypeople Buddhist ritual music and gave lectures on Dharma (mainly focusing on the sūtra of Dizang) since she had been ordained over ten years. Jingding was so successful that it took only one year for her to purchase her first Dharma hall – Fanyin Tang – in Wanhu, Taipei County. In 1976 she built her first nunnery, Baima Si, in Yonghe. Besides teaching Buddhist sūtras, running a convent and a nunnery, Jingding also took an interest in flower arrangement and started writing her master thesis at the Mind Only Institute. Apparently at this point along the path of Jingding’s career, Bhiku Dawu began helping her administer these two communities in great respect.

After getting her master’s degree in 1982, Jingding began to give lectures in her hometown in Kaohsiung every month. She worked very hard to build another Dharma Hall, Jingyuan Jiangtang, in Kaohsiung and left her disciples to assist Dawu to administer Baima Si in the north. One day the manager of Yuanjue Temple came to ask Jingding to be its abess. Yuanjue Temple, like many Taiwanese monasteries, belonged to a lay management committee, not to the clerical residents. In order to rebuild Yuanjue Temple, Jingding sold the Jingyuan Jiangtang to pay the offspring of the former management committee for the ownership of the land of the monastery in the amount of NT$4,000,000 (about $100,000). This was in 1984, when Jingding was 41 years old. At that time, it is important to note, many Dharma halls were located in apartments. This made them convenient for people to reach, but too shabby to be the headquarters of a traditional Buddhist monastery. This may be the reason Jingding decided to accept the position of abess at Yuanjue Temple.

The construction of Yuanjue Temple took three years. Jingding finally took the position of abess and changed the name of Yuanjue to Yuanzhao. Meanwhile, in 1989 she organized her followers to establish the Mahāyāna Association of Buddhist Practice. This organization was led by her brother-in-law. By offering materials, donations, and personal assistance, the organization helped Jingding throughout her career and also helped Ven. Shig Hiu Wan establish Huafan University by holding Dharma festivals, regular monthly Buddhist lectures, summer camps, singing classes, annual support to monks and nuns, annual Taiwanese opera performances, and establishing a Buddhist institute every three years. In 1990, Jingding started to build the third nunnery, Diyuan Nunnery, in Liugui. “Diyuan” means to hear the vow of Bodhisattva Zijo. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of Yuanzhao Temple, in 2004 Jingding held an ordination at Yuanzhao Nunnery and announced the opening of Diyuan Nunnery.

The Life Story of Bhikṣuṇī Dijiao

Dijiao’s autobiography is divided into eight sections: (1) release from impairment (leaving the household life); (2) living like clouds and water; (3) student nun; (4) Xiangde Nunnery; (5) teaching Dharma in Southeastern Asia; (6) continuing the Dharma linage; (7) the earthquake of 1999, the greatest disaster in Taiwan in this century; and (8) promoting the Dharma field of Dizang (Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva). She recorded her own life, beginning with receiving the tonsure and ordination, studying and administrating Xiangde Nunnery, and ultimately establishing her own lineage and the Buddhist Dizang Foundation. Dijiao’s biography offers a clear map to understanding her religious career.

Like Jingding, Dijiao was born in a poor family which led to drop out of school and work to contribute to the family finances until she was 18 years old. The story of how Dijiao entered the Buddhist order is quite
fascinating, however. Unlike Jingding, who was influenced by her pious mother and went to a Buddhist school, Dijiao simply heard the call to repay her parents’ kindness in giving life to her. She began an ascetic pilgrimage alone, spending almost one year to walk from Taipei to Pingdong barefoot. In the course of her walk, she took short breaks at temples and nunneries working in exchange for food. But most of the time, she slept in cemeteries, caves, and abandoned rest stops. It was the abbess of Dongshan Nunnery in Pingdong who induced her to dress correctly as a nun and gave her tonsure at the age of 19.

After tonsure, Dijiao went to Taipei to study at the Buddhist Lotus Institute under the instruction of Bhikṣuṇī Xiuwen for three years. At the age of 20, she received full ordination. Being a monastic student, Dijiao altered her ascetic practices, such as burning marks on her arms and pouring sacred water, over which she chanted the mantra of Thousand-armed Thousand-eyed Guanyin a million times for the welfare of her classmates, into the public drinking fountain. Indeed, she continued to take ascetic walks all her life. As a pilgrim, she celebrated important events, such as school graduations, welcoming new converts, or establishing new Dharma centers. When she sensed an assembling of ghosts in certain areas, she would take a long walk to get there. When she displaced spirits, she would write a will and start a month-long pilgrimage.

At the age of 22, Dijiao graduated from the Buddhist Lotus Institute and began to administrate the Lotus Society in Shipai, Taipei. The Lotus Society mainly offers funeral services. Ten years latter, the lay administrator of Xiangde Temple came to offer Dijiao the position of abbess. Dijiao had visited Xiangde Temple several times and could feel that the location was haunted by negative spirits. The lay administrator had had a dream one night in which the Guanyin image of Xiangde Temple instructed her to ask Dijiao never to leave Xiangde Temple in order to protect the area. Though previous monastic residents had already left the temple, she saw the Dharma hall of Xiangde Temple full of nuns in the dream. Under these circumstances, Dijiao accepted the position of abbess at the temple, spent eight years fighting with businessmen who had occupied the monastic land, and rebuilt the temple. At the age of 30, Dijiao reopened the temple as Xiangde Nunnery and, in 1986, she formally became the abbess.

In 1987, Dijiao established a Buddhist school to teach the nuns at Xiangde Nunnery. Two years later, she built Dizang Chansi (a temple for Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva) in the city of Hualian as a communications center for Xiangdem Nunnery. Meanwhile, she did not relinquish her connection to Taipei. When Xiangde Nunnery was damaged by a typhoon in 1990, Dijiao established another Dizang Chansi in Taipei and successfully raised enough donations to repair Xiangde Nunnery. When Xiangde Nunnery reopened in 1991, a 36-feet-tall image of Dizang was placed in front of the nunnery. At the age of 39, Dijiao formally transferred her lineage to her disciple, Bhikṣuṇī Jueguang, and devoted herself to establishing a headquarters for Dizang Chansi in Taizhong.

In the same year, 1994, the International Jingguang Association was funded as a lay organization affiliated with Dizang Chansi. The main function of Jingguang Association is to teach Dharma to college students. In 1995 the association extended its service to primary and high school students. In 1999, Dijiao established a fifth Taiwan Dizang Chansi. She also established five Dizang Chansis in Southeast Asia and one in Australia. Since her first visit of Malaysia in 1985, Dijiao continuously returned to this area to teach the Kṣitigarbha Sūtra and led a chanting ritual almost every year. In her eyes, there were some haunted areas inhabited by dissatisfied spirits that led her to conducted ascetic walks in Penang. Today, overseas branches of Dizang Chansi are located in Penang, Kedah (Malaysia), Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahur (Philippines), and Singapore.

**Similar Career Tracks for Two Taiwanese Nuns**

There exists similarity between the autobiographies of Jingding and Dijiao which may help us to identify commonalities in the careers of contemporary Taiwanese nuns. First, most nuns receive monastic education
before or after ordination. This high educational profile also makes them capable of preaching Dharma and leading rituals. Second, Taiwanese nuns do not need to build their head nunnery through their masters’ heritage nor by themselves. Many Buddhist temples are administered or owned by laypeople who are interested in finding capable nuns to re-establish their temples. This provides opportunities for nuns such as Jingding and Dijiao, neither of whom is the eldest disciple of her master and thereby heir to a temple. In such a situation, Taiwanese nuns typically need to deal with many financial problems related to monastic property in order to gain their independence. Third, a huge diversity of forms of religious cultivation among different Buddhist temples emerges. Even though Jingding and Dijiao both promote the worship of Dizang, each has developed a distinctive interpretation and style of organization.

Observing the similarity between these two nuns’ careers, one may conclude that the master-and-disciple tie among Taiwanese nuns may be weak but their network spreads broadly. Moreover, the loyalty of lay Buddhists relies heavily on the qualities of their master, rather than geographical connections or sectarian identity.

The social backgrounds of Jingding and Dijiao are very similar. Both nuns are from poor families, received advanced education at Buddhist institutions, developed relationships with Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, and became famous for promoting the worship of Dizang. However, the forms of their religious practice are distinct, as is their worship of Dizang.

**Diversity in Dizang Worship**

Traditionally, Chinese Buddhists have approached the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* as a means of teaching filial piety, on a par with the *Xiaojing* in the Confucian canon. According to the sūtra, in a previous life Dizang was a pious and filial girl who saved her mother from the sufferings of hell. This story is very similar to that of Bhikṣu Mulian (Maugaliyana), who saved his mother from hell, but is not broadly incorporated into Chinese funeral rituals. Since daughters are mostly excluded from funeral rituals according to the Chinese system of ancestor worship, the diminished popularity of the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* is understandable. However, the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* is quite popular among women for another more important reason. It is said that woman chanting the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* receive assistance to cleanse the previous bad karma of a fetus and give birth to a child of beautiful appearance. It seems that the worship of Dizang strengthens the bond between mother and children.

Even though chanting the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* may bring much religious merit to the family, most Chinese Buddhists have refused such worship in their households. Because Dizang is viewed as a guardian deity of the suffering ghosts in hell, the practice is usually associated with *yin*, the dark and negative element, in contrast to the bright and prosperous *yang*. Since Dizang took a great vow “to achieve Buddhahood only when no being is confined to hell,” the bodhisattva’s influence is primarily in hell. Relating hell to death, Dizang was put into the category of a *yin* deity, associated with contamination, danger, and untouchability. For this reason, many Taiwanese communities build a Dizan Temple to accommodate the memorial tablets of those who have died without producing a male offspring to worship them. These homeless ghosts are considered serious trouble-makers who threaten the safety of the whole community. For the welfare of the whole community, every household is obligated to support the construction of a Dizang temple, but this does not mean that they would like to have a Dizang statue in their own homes.

It is not certain whether Bhiksuni Jingding devoted herself to Dizang as a filial daughter, but it is obvious that Jingding was aware of the taboo surrounding Dizang, because audiences resisted her evening lectures on the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* in the beginning. Some even felt frightened and uncomfortable worshiping Dizang in the evening. From the perspective of orthodox Buddhism, Jingding viewed the fear of Dizang coming from hell as ridiculous – a result of adulteration from folk religion. In order to overcome this myth, she created the intensive seven-day walking camp to promote the worship of Dizang. Participants continue to chant
the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* and meditate on an image of Dizang as they walk, then transfer all the accumulated merit to their parents. Jingding emphasizes that the real meaning of worshiping Dizang is to express filial piety toward one’s parents. Only when all members are filial toward their parents, she believes, the disturbed social order will return to normal.

To a certain degree, Jingding’s understanding about the worship of Dizang is restricted to the Buddhist *sūtras* and she has taken a strong position to correct the popular misconceptions about Dizang. However, she created a new form of intensive meditation, not only walking, but also by concentrating on devotion to Dizang. The practice is usually held in an open yard during the daytime and the scene is full of commotion. Interestingly, most participants are elderly. Compared to traditional Chan meditation and chanting the name of Amitābha, the Dizang walking meditation requires less skill.

In contrast to Jingding, Dijiao emphasizes Dizang’s power to appease ghosts. The autobiography of Dijiao shows that whenever disasters occur, whether earthquakes, typhoons, floods, personal illnesses, or accidents, Dijiao exercises her supernormal vision and conducts rituals to counteract the damage of interfering forces. Dijiao seems to possess the power to predict the onset of disasters and she attributes this gift to Dizang’s blessing.

Of course, all predictions are proved to be real afterwards. Dijiao also avoids discussing her vision before any events, especially for public safety. But she conducts ecstatic cultivation alone, such as, undertaking pilgrimages to respective locations, or holding a ceremony in the name of Dizang to appease ghosts. For instance, in the course of rebuilding Xiangde Nunnery, which was located next to a cliff, Dijiao claimed to feel ghosts haunting the area and constructed the highest statue of Dizang in Taiwan in order to purify the place. Latter, many “signs” emerged to prove her suggestion a wise move. Two young people who lost their way on mountain were saved by nuns, because an image of Dizang appeared right on the spot where they were. In another miraculous incident, terrible weather suddenly cleared up right before the opening ceremony of the statue of Dizang. Moreover, a worker falling off from the statue and being seriously hurt was viewed as a good sign, since he was miraculously awakened and was paying off a certain debt from his previous life.

The way Dijiao elaborated on the accident of the falling worker also indicates how she proves to her followers the reliable power of Dizang. Indeed, the critical element is Dijiao’s piety and compassion. Dijiao told the worker that she had already “seen” his bad luck and tried very hard to get him to stay and join the ceremony. More dramatically, the worker claimed he had had a dream at the hospital, a dream in which he met Dijiao sitting in front of a huge, glorious image of Dizang at the entrance of hell. Frightened awake by the dream, he regained consciousness. He believed that Dijiao asked Dizang to save his life.

Many women also come to Dijiao for help, most of them troubled by illnesses, either their children’s or their own. Besides explaining these problems as the result of past-life karma, a very general Buddhist explanation, Dijiao sometimes attributes family disasters to interferences from the ghosts of fetuses. Often, the women consulting her respond with astonishment. Since an abortion is a very private affair, how can Dijiao know the darkest secrets of their lives?

Abortion is definitely a personal experience, but this does not mean that abortion is merely a private matter. According to a governmental calculation, 30% of the pregnancies in Taiwan in 1993 ended in abortion. As mentioned previously, Chinese Buddhism does not endorse Dizang with any ritual to deal with abortion. Nevertheless, the worship of Dizang in Japan has developed a system of fetus-ghost appeasement, known as *miziko kuyō*, and this system was introduced into Taiwan in the 1970s. Traditionally, Chinese believe that an aborted fetus-ghost only bothered the family by preventing offspring after marriage from performing the ancestral worship that was their due. In the Chinese system of ancestor worship, only married people can achieve the status of an ancestor and be worshiped by their offspring, and this is especially true for women. Although Dijiao recognizes the danger of revenge by a fetus-ghost for the whole family, departing from the traditional view, she points out the critical role the mother plays in pacifying the aborted fetus, rather than the need for appeasing the ghost by performing a ghost marriage.
Near the end of the 20th century, many disasters occurred in Taiwan, including the 1999 earthquake, aircraft crashes, flooding brought about by typhoons, and several fires in high-rise buildings in the cities. These upheavals increased public tension and caused many rumors in search of an explanation for these losses. Moreover, economical decline affecting most families also created a strong sense of the coming of the final day. In this atmosphere of social anxiety, Dijiao’s promotion of Dizang belief seems to have attracted many followers, both for its religious explanation and as a means of relieving community stress and individual suffering.

Dijiao did not hide her special power to communicate with ghosts in her autobiography; indeed, she recorded that her dead sister appeared to remind Dijiao to distribute the merit of pilgrimage with her sister. When sitting in meditation at a graveyard, some spirits also appeared to protect Dijiao. Thus, it seems natural for Dijiao to devote herself to the ghost-appeasing power of Dizang. In this way, Dijiao can successfully offer herself as a medium to her followers and eventually become an agent (even incarnation) of Dizang.

Conclusion

The comparison between Jingding and Dijiao shows most strikingly that Buddhism never drives a clear-cut line between doctrine and cultural ideas such as filial piety and ghost revenge. Filial piety seems to have nothing to do with ghost revenge, but it turns out that “persons” need to occupy their proper positions in the ancestral lineage, lest they haunt their living relatives. With regard to filial piety, parents also have a right and a duty to help displaced children assume their proper positions in the ancestral lineage. It is believed that the complex bond between parents and children does not cease at death in Chinese society. From a Buddhist perspective, however, it is karmic relationships that determine the roles of parents and children. Moreover, rebirth is not confined merely to one’s ancestral lineage. In that Jingding reinforces children’s filial piety toward their parents and Dijiao emphasizes parents’ repentance for the deaths of their children, both build on the Buddhist notion ritual redemption for attaining salvation. In this way, both of these nuns not only help resolve their followers’ problems, but also establish their own religious authority.

The distinctive approaches taken by Jingding and Dijiao point to an ambiguous space between doctrine and practice. Following the monastic curriculum, Jingding focuses on Buddhist scriptures. In contrast, Dijiao practices esoteric cultivation and is believed to possess mystical powers. There are plenty examples of monks who have claimed or be credited with mystical powers in Buddhist history. The point is that these two nuns have instantiated their interpretations of Buddhist thought and practice through their worship of Dizang. In that Jingding and Dijiao have developed their own rituals and their own systems of interpretation, they seem to have expanded the Buddhist notion of universal salvation to accommodate local religious practices and also made the whole matter look simple to accomplish. Jingding persuades her audience to accept the “correct” doctrines and to rely on Dizang. Dijiao emphasizes the blessings of Dizang and offers herself as a compassionate medium.

It is not necessary to view the success of these two nuns in the 1990s in terms of the close relation between Dizang worship and social disasters. The perceived decline of family values in society is also a major contemporary concern. Religious leaders emphasize filial piety and the duties of parents by turns. In addition, rapid industrialization in Taiwan and related financial upheavals have created new differentials, especially between urban and rural areas, that require new explanations and solutions. Jingding and Dijiao, having emerged from disadvantaged social backgrounds, are adept at ministering to the needs of disadvantaged segments of society. In this regard, they differ from some mainstream Buddhist groups, in which social and economic status are often means of advancement. Their success in exploring different strategies testifies to the diversity not only of individual nuns, but also of Buddhist agency more broadly.
NOTES


4. Reports of these activities are regularly posted on the website of Yuanzhao Temple: http://myweb.hinet.net/home4/yuenchao.


Master Yinshun Shi (b. 1906) wrote that there is not a single specific place for the worship of Guanyin, but it could be anywhere the spirit and the essence of Great Compassion, peculiar of Guanyin Bodhisattva, prevails. Contemporary Taiwan has been called Guanyin’s nunnery because of the large number of local Buddhist nuns who are disciples of Guanyin. The Taiwanese nuns are Dharma practitioners who spread the Dharma and are concretely engaged in society, offering guidance for lay disciples to realize the Way.

Here I present the disciples of Guanyin who are resident at two nunneries, Yitongsi and Fayuansi, both located in Xinzhu and related, in terms of reciprocal support and cooperation, to the Master Yinshun, a scholar monk who is well known for his “Buddhism for the Human Realm” (renjian fojiao). This paper is not meant as a general work on all the female disciples or followers of Master Yinshun, but a description of some of them. It includes an introductory analysis of Yinshun’s perspective on the issue of gender equality, and his special emphasis on the necessity of equal opportunities for both men and women (and therefore for both monks and nuns) to be able to reach the depth of the Dharma.

Master Yinshun and Guanyin Bodhisattva

Any great Bodhisattva embodies one particular virtue. Compassion and mercy are the values embodied by Guanyin Bodhisattva. If we do not kill, and offer universal love and protection to all living beings without making any distinction or discrimination, our mind and conduct correspond to the compassion and mercy of Guanyin.

Master Yinshun stated that faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva is particularly popular among Chinese, especially among women. He also stressed the strong connection and similarity between Guanyin Bodhisattva and women:

The gentle essence of [Guanyin] Bodhisattva’s great compassion and mercy is similar to women’s love and kindness. That is why faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva is popular especially among women and Guanyin often takes the shape of a female body, gentle and kind.

Master Yinshun listed two main reasons that explain why Guanyin Bodhisattva is represented in a female body in Chinese Buddhism: first, because women can endure pain showed by women, and second, because kindness and compassion are particular characteristics of women.
Yinshun also makes a comparison between Guanyin Bodhisattva and the figure of the mother. According to Ven. Yinshun, Guanyin Bodhisattva has the same attitude toward human beings that any mother has towards her own children, and vice versa. This can explain why those who believe in Guanyin Bodhisattva and pray to Guanyin Bodhisattva are comparable to children who believe in their own mother and pray to her, showing absolute trust and sincere kindness. A mother may protect her child, but cannot grant the child bright future, since this does not depend only on her, but is also the result of the child’s firm will and great effort. Based on these premises, the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, as “Disciples of Guanyin,” aim to guide human beings with motherly kindness and compassion, showing them the Way and helping them to reach the highest achievement of both compassion and wisdom.

**Master Yinshun’s Call for Gender Equality**

Yinshun has often expressed his firm conviction about equality between female and male members of the monastic community:

> Buddhism has made no distinction between men and women in faith, correct practice, wisdom.... Women and men, both and alike can practice the Way and reach the liberation.... Women are wise and strong, and at the same time not inferior.\(^9\)

His contribution to the order of nuns is evident in his support for nuns’ education and training. His promotion of and attempts to improve nuns’ education and training were also meant to encourage cooperation between male and female members of the Saṅgha.

Yinshun’s efforts and initiatives aroused both appreciation and criticism among the local monastics and laity. As for appreciation, Yinshun became worthy to be called a promoter of gender equality in Buddhism and thus signed an important page of the history and development of the nuns’ order on the island. As for opposition, Yinshun was said to be “fully dedicated to nuns,”\(^10\) a claim that Yinshun found ridiculous.\(^11\) In addition, Yinshun was criticized for “mixing together female and male disciples.”\(^12\)

**Fayuan Nunnery**

Shi Binzong (1911–1958), the founder of Fayuan Nunnery, belonged to the Tiantai school. Shi Binzong was born in 1911 in Lugang (Zhanghua county). His lay name was Shi Nenggong. At 14 years, he received tonsure under Shi Miaochan at Shitoushan. In 1933, he moved to mainland China where he received the full monastic ordination under Shi Yuanying (1934). In 1935, he studied at Guanzongsi under the guidance of Shi Baojing. Later, he focused his research on the Tiantai school under the guidance of Shi Jingquan. In 1939, he went back to Taiwan and for some time gave lectures on the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* at Longhuan, a nunneriy belonging to the Dharma school of Dagangshan. Later he established two Tiantai monasteries, Fayuansi in Xinzhu and Hongfayuan in Taipei. He also traveled to Japan (together with Shi Juexin), where he excelled in his studies of the Buddha’s teachings. He passed away in 1958 at Hongfayuan.

Among his literary works, Ven. Binzong’s skill in poetry became quite well-known. Among his disciples were Shi Juexin (second abbot of Fayuansi), Shi Huiyu (a Buddhist master belonging to the Vinaya school), and Shi Jingxin (secretary of the Chinese Buddhist Association since 1993). Kan Zhengzong has linked him to Buddhism for the Human Realm and included him on the list of the most outstanding monastics engaged in Buddhist education and spreading the Dharma.\(^13\) Among the institutes that he established, Southern Tiantai Buddhist Studies Institute (Nantiantai foxue yanjiuyuan) is well known on the island. Kan Zhengzong included it in his list of the most preeminent Buddhist institutes for monastics’ education and
training founded between 1949 to 1971. Among his female followers, Shi Tianyi, a nun called the “monastic empress” (niguwang) was one of his students.

The two most outstanding nuns in the history of Fayuansi were Shi Renhui and Kuanqian. It was Renhui (b. 1928) who changed Fayuansi into a nunnery. Born in 1928, she became a nun under Shi Daguo at Wanfosi in Xinzhu, a traditional Taiwanese temple. At the age of fifty, she undertook the difficult mission of running Fayuansi.

In February 1987, after Juexin’s death, the male monastic residents of Fayuansi soon scattered far and wide. At that time, the only nuns who could manage the temple were Renhui and Kuanqian. Finally, the monastic residents chose Renhui, since she had actually been running the monastery for almost ten years already. This choice, together with the lack of male disciples, explains why Fayuansi became a nunnery in the late 1980s – a place specifically suited for the training and cultivation of local women, the “disciples of Guanyin.” During her time as abbess, Renhui was assisted by Shi Zhenli and Kuanqian. Together they modernized the complex, at the same time maintaining full respect for tradition. As a result of their stable management, both the monastic and lay disciples of Fayuansi increased in number.

The nun Kuanqian (b. 1956) was known for her promotion of Buddhist fine arts. Born in 1956, she graduated from the Department of Architecture at Danjiang University. In 1983, she became a disciple of Juexin and at the time started to think about becoming a nun. She received the tonsure and full monastic precepts under Juexin in 1986. Kuanqian had four main mentors who guided her daily life and Dharma practice. First was her father, Yang Yingfeng, who inspired her to study fine arts and architecture. As for the Dharma path, Juexin was the figure who first guided her in the study and cultivation of Buddhism, the one in whom she took refuge, and under whose guidance she became a nun. A second eminent monk of fundamental importance for the kind of practice she decided to follow and still promotes was Master Yinshun. Yinshun’s writings and interpretation of the Dharma changed her idea of Dharma practice and led her to walk the bodhisattva path. Finally, but not less important, was Shi Zhenhua, who took care of her, much like another refuge master. Zhenhua asked her to teach at the Fuyan Buddhist Institute (Fuyan foxueyuan).

In terms of Buddhist cultivation, Yinshun certainly was preeminent. After becoming a nun under Juexin, Kuanqian considered the traditional way of practicing the Pure Land teachings, consisting of the recitation of Amitbha Buddha’s name (nian fo cheng ming), to be quite limited, and a misunderstanding of the Buddha’s teachings in a certain sense. Moreover, she did not find in this practice the reason why she decided to become a nun, a “disciple of Guanyin.” A metaphor she founded in Yinshun’s works made her understand the vastness of the Dharma and gave her the inspiration for a different way of cultivating the Buddhist teachings. This was the way of practice that Yinshun promoted and called “Buddhism for the Human Realm.”

During my visit to Fayuan, Kuanqian also told me that the books of Yinshun that left the strongest impression on her were Three Principles for the Practice of the Dharma (Xuefo sanyao) and My Viewpoint on Religion (Wo zhi zongjiao guan). Interestingly, Kuanqian first became a nun and then guided her father, Yang Yingfeng, to the Dharma. Nevertheless, father and daughter journeyed together in discovering the Buddhist teachings and both chose the guidance of Yinshun. Kuanqian remembers that she shared whatever she learned with her father:

Generally, it is not an easy task to read through Yinshun’s books and understand their deep meaning, but you are definitely enriched as you reach the point, and in this way I explained Yinshun’s thought to my father. Actually, my father’s thought was really based on traditional Chinese culture. Before he was rather interested in Daoism and had many books on Yijing, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. Later, those books decreased in number, while the Buddhist texts became more and more numerous.
How much Buddhism influenced Yang Yingfeng is also seen in his art. As Kuanqian said:

In Taiwan, the term “landscape contemplation” first began to be used with my father. He conceived landscape as “outer creation” and contemplation as “inner contemplation,” passing through Dharma wisdom and combining it with art. The last essay that he wrote was *Treatise on Mahāyāna Landscape Contemplation.*

**The Daily Life and Practice of Fayuan Nuns**

When describing Fayuan, Kuanqian told me, “A monastery must be a quiet place, because it is the place where the disciples of the Dharma carried out their cultivation.” The resident nuns at Fayuan live in full accordance with Buddhist traditions. They wake up at 4:30, from 5:00 to 5:30 they attend the morning service, at 6:00 breakfast is served, and so on. The daily schedule of the resident nuns must follow tradition, because, as Kuanqian told me, “Tradition is important.” Spreading the Dharma and “going into the human world” are more innovative (less traditional, in Chinese Buddhist terms, at least) and Yinshun was a promoter of “Buddhism for the Human Realm.”

Kuanqian is well-known for combining fine arts and the Buddha’s teachings. In addition, she deserves to be mentioned for combining the Northern Buddhist tradition (*bei chuan*) and the Southern Buddhist tradition (*nan chuan*) in the cultivation followed and promoted in at Fayuan. As soon as I entered the main gate of Fayuan, it was obvious that this place of practice belonged fully to the Northern tradition. As Kuanqian explained to me as we walked from one hall to another, this could be seen from the main shrine hall and the practice followed during morning and evening services. However, behind the main building of Fayuan, after passing through an “artistic garden” (rich in works by Yang Yingfeng) and ascending the hill, we arrived at a quiet wood, a place for practicing meditation in accordance with the Southern tradition. A large number of wooden seats (each with a net for protection) were placed under trees all around the hill. Living quarters were built for practitioners who stayed overnight to enjoy meditation retreats. These quarters and a shrine among the rooms are small, made of wood, and elegant in their simplicity Kuanqian told me that the length of retreats is quite flexible, ranging from a weekend to a few weeks, depending on availability.

Inside the nunnery, there is no institute, but simply a place of practice. As a result, some nuns are studying in Buddhist institutes and others are attending university. The nuns’ education and training focuses on inner cultivation and active engagement in society:

Practicing the bodhisattva path will always be my mission, even if I have already passed through several obstacles and difficult circumstances. Good practice is generally considered a secluded life in the mountain, without involvement in the secular matters, but I hope to be more in touch with human beings and get more opportunities to spread the Dharma. According to the traditional [interpretation of the Dharma], this path is less clear and opens one to mistakes and criticism. At the beginning, I thought perhaps my *bodhicitta* was obstructed, but reading through Yinshun’s *Miao yun Collection (Miaoyun ji)*, I got a new lease on life – a kind of rebirth – so I dared to continue that way of cultivation and practice. I even maintain that I will walk this path not just in this lifetime, but also the next one.

One of the guiding principles of Buddhism for the Human Realm is “going out from the monastery and entering the society.” Like her disciples, Kuanqian has been following this concretely, in various ways, but under a single key phrase, “Dharma and the Arts,” meaning to express the Dharma through the fine arts and present the fine arts through the Dharma. Kuanqian always makes parallels between Dharma and the arts and combines Dharma and the arts by trying to translate Dharma in artistic language and rendering
the Buddhist teachings in an artistic form. Kuanqian's mission may be summarized as an attempt to explain Dharma through art.19

Fayuan now organizes cultural activities, seminars on Buddhist art, Buddhist lectures, and an active exchange with students and scholars, especially those from the Xinzhu area. In 1991, to further her initiatives, Kuanqian founded a branch of Fayuan Temple next to Xinzhu Railway Station. She included cultural initiatives such as courses in Buddhist music, Buddhist literature, and Buddhist art. In December 2002, during one of my visits, I personally saw some of the interesting, well-developed activities for children and young people.

Publishing is another way to spread the Dharma that is perfectly in line with the principles of the Buddhism for the Human Realm. Because of her emphasis on the importance of the arts, Kuanqian focuses on publications on the arts, especially Buddhist art. These publications are in different forms, such as periodicals, books, and tapes.

Fayuansi and Master Yinshun20

The nuns at Fayuan encountered Master Yinshun through Kuanqian, and via two different channels: Buddhist art and Buddhist doctrine. I have already mentioned above the influence that Yinshun’s thought exerted on Kuanqian and her way to follow the Bodhisattva Path. She learned the Dharma reading through Yinshun’s literature, and finally she was a teacher in the Fuyan Buddhist Institute founded by Yinshun himself, as called by Zhenhua for the 5th cycle. As a teacher, she taught the teachings of the Mahaprajnaparamita as well as Pure Land philosophy, especially their interpretation by Yinshun.

Nevertheless, the first personal meeting between Kuanqian and Master Yinshun happened because of her father and for “artistic” reasons. In 1987, Kuanqian accompanied her father to Nantou (where Yinshun was residing at that time), in order to take photos of the master for a statue that would have reproduced him and that Yang Yingfeng was commissioned to realize.21

Combining Dharma and the arts led her to find similarities and points of contact between Dharma and the arts. Taking Yinshun’s thought as representative of the Dharma teachings and Yang Yingfeng’s artistic works as examples of the fine arts, she drew parallels between Yinshun’s writings and her father’s statues. In her opinion, any production holds in its essence the spirit shown in its first expressions, even if it becomes more and more refined and developed over time. In these terms, she maintained that Yinshun’s philosophy had already been expressed in his first work, titled Indian Buddhism (Yindu zhi fojiao), even though it was further developed in his later writings. In the same way, her father’s works had maintained the same style as his first creations. She expressed this idea once in a conversation with Shi Houguan (a disciple of Yinshun and Dean of the Fuyan Buddhist Institute since 1999). Asked if there were any differences between the two Buddha statues created by her father, Kuanqian replied that the small Buddha image down from the hill could be compared with Yinshun’s work titled Indian Buddhism, and the large big Buddha image in the main shrine hall on the hill could be compared to his work titled, A History of Indian Buddhist Thought (Yindu Fojiao sixiang shi).22 Contacts between Fayuan and the Fuyan are still frequent, as the cooperation between Kuanqian and Houguan clearly indicates.

Yitong Nunnery: From Zhaitang to Fosi

The Yitong Nunnery has a history of more than 300 years. It started as a Vegetarian Hall (zhaitang). It was then turned into a Buddhist temple (fosi) and subsequently passed through a few phases of development and rebuilding. Some introductory observations should be made.

Firstly, we must distinguish between the history of Yitong and the history of the female Buddhist College built inside. Secondly, Yitong should be linked to Faguangsi (Taipei), being Shi Ruxue, a disciple
of Shi Xuanshen. Finally, Yitong reached the West with the establishment of the Yitong Buddhist Temple in Canada.

Yitongsì and Yitongtàng are the names of two different complexes. Built at the end of the 19th century, Yitongtàng was one of the numerous zhaítang erected in Taiwan. A zhaítang is a place of practice and worship for zhaigu (vegetarian women),23 the female disciples of the so-called zhaijiao (Vegetarian Religion).24 Chen Jinzhi, a local woman who was assigned to run Yitongtàng in 1915, played an important role in the history of Yitontàng, especially later, when she became a disciple of Shi Juelì, and, under the Dharma name Jueming, made the change from a private zhaítang to a Buddhist temple.

Juelì, who was the founder of one of the Four Great Lineages (si da menpái), helped to revitalize and develop the local Buddhism through two main efforts: the education of the Saṅgha (especially the nuns) and the organization of Ordination Ceremonies. In his efforts to promote education, Juelì foresaw the key role that nuns would play in the future of Taiwanese Buddhism. He helped to form the basis of the present vitality of the Taiwanese “Disciples of Guanyin,” by providing nuns’ training and educational programs. His contribution was essential to elevate the nuns’ position in the monastery as well as in society, and to set the stage for dominance of nuns in post-Retrocession Taiwan.

The first phase of development was under the guidance of Juelì, with Xuanshen as abbess. She entered nunhood under Shi Dajìng, who was a disciple of Shi Miaoguo, in his turn a disciple of Juelì. This connection also made Yitong an affiliate of the Fayun lineage of Juelì. In this phase Yitong was completely settled as an orthodox Buddhist complex.

Yitong: The Second Phase of Development

The second abbess, the leading figure of this phase, is Shi Rulin, who led Yitong to the present condition. Right now Yitong is a complex including a nunnery (Yitongsì) and a Buddhist institute called Yitong Female Buddhist College (Yitong nüzhòng foxueyuan). The resident nuns of the nunnery are more than 20, while 32 students were enrolled in the Yitong Female Buddhist College at the time of my visits – 20 nuns and 12 laywomen, to be exact. The nunnery and college are two different complexes, separated but linked at the same time. Rulin is both abbess of the nunnery and Dean of the College. “A few years ago Rulin and I went to Canada and found that place which was suitable to build a spot for the practice and the spread of the Dharma.”25 Therefore, three years ago, in the northeastern area of Vancouver, nearby Oregon Lake, Yitong Buddhist Temple was established. Nowadays, three nuns from Taiwan moved to the center in Canada, where they are studying English and organizing Buddhist activities for the local people. A few Canadians enjoy meditation classes and retreats every Sunday, while the Dharma Function held once a month has the participation of up to 70 disciples, including Canadians, but for the most part Vietnamese and overseas Chinese. The Chinese New Year is also celebrated and enjoyed by more than one hundred people. Shi Xingru is one of the resident nuns in Canada. Called back to Taiwan for the opening of the Yitong Female Buddhist College, she returned to the West after the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

Yitongsì and Master Yinshun

The history of Yitong is linked to the foundation of Fuyan Vihara, and therefore there is a close connection between the nuns’ education at Yitong and the Fuyan Buddhist Institute for monks as well. Xuanshen and Yinshun, through their joint efforts, are those who made all this happen. Juelì helped Yitong become a place for Dharma cultivation and Yinshun helped the resident nuns get a better Dharma education, bringing the training of the “disciples of Guanyin” in Xinzhu to a higher level.
Yitong and Fuyan Vihara began early in the 1950s, when Yinshun looked for land to establish his vihara. Xuanshen, who was the abbess of Yitong at the time, informed Yinshun about an available piece of land just up the hill behind Yitong. Afterwards, Fuyan Vihara (Fuyan jingshe) was built. As Yinshun settled in Xinzhu, a second gift from the compassionate “Guanyin” Xuanshen arrived. Since the only nearby street was from downtown to the main gate of Yitong and did not reach the buildings of Fuyan, the nunery undertook the task of preparing a second road from the main gate of Yitong to the Fuyan complex. Xuanshen helped Yinshun to settle in Xinzhu and later arranged for Yinshun to give Dharma talks in Xinzhu. Xuanshen became well-known for translating the Dharma talks given by mainland monks into Taiwanese, which was (and still is) the most popular spoken dialect in Xinzhu. Apart from Shi Cihang and Shi Xingyun, she was also assigned as the translator of Yinshun’s speeches, in order to make Yinshun’s interpretation of the Dharma understandable to the local Buddhist disciples.

Later, the hall designed for the kindergarten was given to Fuyan and became the center for the open courses given by Fuyan to the lay people willing to study the Dharma. If a nun and her nunny helped Yinshun to settle in Xinzhu under different aspects, Yinshun in his turn helped the local nuns to get a Buddhist education and training in the Dharma. It was a long process that developed in more sequential steps. The first step was recognizing the state of the local monastics’ education. After discovering how the local monks as well as the nuns were deprived of Buddhist knowledge, Yinshun made the vow and undertook the difficult task to change this general trend and make the Saṅgha able to fully understand, live and spread what the Buddha taught.

The second step was to organize a seminar on Buddhist teachings, called bantian ke (“the half-day class”) in 1956 in Xinzhu (at Fuyuan), a formula that had already been tested previously at Huiri Jiangtang in Taipei. In truth, the seminar was originally planned in 1955 for two young monks, Shi Nengxue and Shi Chuandi, who moved to Fuyan when they received full ordination and needed guidelines for practice, both inner and outer. Yinshun and the people in Fuyan decided to hold this seminar (a two-hour morning class each day) the next year, during the second semester. Nevertheless, as these classes were announced, some young women from Xinzhu also expressed a wish to attend the course and did it in a clever and accurate way. These six or seven women were either nuns or about to become nuns, as Yinshun mentions in his autobiography, In Ordinary Life (Pingfan de yisheng).

The third step was the establishment of a Buddhist Institute for “disciples of Guanyin” called Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women (Xinzhu nüzhong foxueyuan), which opened late in 1957 inside the complex of Yitong. The decision to take this important step to provide Buddhist education for local nuns was the result of awareness and concern on the part of Xuanshen, Yinshun, and Shi Yanpei in response to a lack of opportunities for female members of the Saṅgha to study the Dharma.

From Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women to Yitong Buddhist College for Women

This is for us monastics an era that discriminates against women. But the Master [Yinshun] never showed a discriminating attitude toward women. I remember that in the autumn of 1957, the Master said: “Taiwanese women have great potential!” Consider that the Buddhist temples throughout the province are all administrated by women (including the Vegetarian Women). Because of their industry and frugality, they make the temples pure and elegant, in a way that drives all the disciples to study and practice the Dharma. Some [of these Buddhist women] did not even receive a high school education, but still they work hard to accomplish their duties and practice, showing a religious sentiment that is definitely worthy of appreciation. With incomparable wisdom, Master [Yinshun] decided that these women with latent energies needed to be educated and finally organized, together with the nun Xuanshen (abbess of Yitong), the Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women (Xinzhu nüzhong foxueyuan), where monks from the nearby Fuyan Vihara came to teach.
Inaugurated in the autumn of 1957, the Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women was originally organized with Yinshun as dean, Yanpei as assistant dean, and monks from Fuyan as teachers. Although this much was arranged by Fuyan, Yitong was responsible for accommodations for the enrolled students and the costs of the initiative. More than 40 “disciples of Guanyin” enrolled. Since it was college for women, Yinshun realized the importance of female guidance and invited Huang Benzhen from Hongkong to take the position of supervisor. Later, Huang Benzhen decided to become a nun and took the monastic name Huiying.

The year 1957 was important for the history of the college, since during the winter one of the enrolled students expressed the intention to become a nun. This woman became a nun with Yinshun as her tonsure master and took the monastic name Huiyu. Another step was taken during the second school term by restricting entrance to the college to nuns; as a consequence, some of the enrolled students became nuns, among them Shi Huili.

In the summer of 1960 another initiative was conceived by Yinshun and supported by Xuanshen. Some changes were made in the educational curriculum at Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women: in addition to having a female supervisor, Yinshun realized that it would also be ideal to have nuns as teachers, with monks available only in case of necessity. An “advanced course” for some of the nuns who graduated that year was planned at Pingguangsi in Taipei. Among the nuns who moved to Taipei in 1960 for that reason were Huiyu and two others who had just become nuns, Shi Huirui and Shi Huiyu. In the end, the course was not held and the nuns who moved to Taipei remained there to attend Dharma services (zao ke and wan ke) at Huiri Jiangtang and a second cycle of “half-day classes.” None of the female disciples who followed Yinshun to Taipei went back to Xinzhu, much to the regret of Xuanshen and the college. The result of so much joint effort lasted only one academic cycle, a total of three years, and then the College closed, mainly for economic reasons. Anyway, during those three years, about 20 monks came to give classes. Once Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women closed, the local nuns enrolled in Fuyan Buddhist Institute to receive a Buddhist education. The nun Xingru, for instance, was in the fourth cycle at Fuyan.

Due to improved economical conditions, a new college for women, called Yitong Buddhist College for women (Yitong nüzhong foxueyuan) was opened in September 2002. This college replaced Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women. Like it predecessor, this new institute was closely connected with Fuyan Buddhist Institute and the figure of Master Yinshun. Just like forty years ago, there is still an active exchange between the two institutions. Many of the books in the library come from Fuyan Library and monks from Fuyan often come down and teach at the Yitong Buddhist College. Some nuns, lay devotees, and even Houguan, the dean of Fuyan Buddhist Institute, volunteer at Yitong and attend the open courses offered by Fuyan teachers.

Some requirements must be fulfilled in order to be admitted to the college. Each candidate must pass entrance exams (written and oral) on Chinese language and Buddhist teachings. There is also an age restriction for the applicants, who should be between 20 to 35 years of age, though this rule is flexible. Enrollment is open to foreigners, too; at the time of my visit, there were six foreign students enrolled, from Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Two programs have been started: a three-year senior high school degree program and a four-year university degree program. However, as I was told during my visits, the college just opened in September 2002, and most of its management has yet to be planned or realized. The students’ courses include classes on Buddhism (including courses on Vinaya) and language courses in Chinese, English, and Japanese. Courses in Tibetan, Pali, and Sanskrit are planned but have not yet been initiated. As for the texts used in the college, a particular emphasis is place on Yinshun’s works, especially those which are related to the Prajnaparamita scriptures. Even more stress is put on the volume The Way to Buddhahood (Cheng fo zhi dao). The teachers include nuns from Yitong, as well as monks from Fuyan and laypeople (for the language courses). Every year the students take a middle-term exam and a final-term exam. The nuns come from different monasteries, are not required to stay any further in Yitong after they graduate.
The dean of the college is Rulin, who is also the abbess of Yitong. She is not assigned as a teacher, but sometimes holds a few classes anyway. Xingru is the supervisor. The library inside the college is well organized and offers fundamental reference works. All the volumes are organized into ten main categories: (1) Buddhist Teachings; (2) Buddhist History and Places; (3) Sūtra Pitaka and Commentaries; (4) Vinaya Pitaka and Commentaries; (5) Abhidhamma Pitaka and Commentaries; (6) Practice and Ceremonial Etiquette; (7) Buddhist Literature; (8) Schools of Chinese Buddhism; (9) Schools of Worldwide Buddhism; and (10) Miscellaneous. In addition to these ten main sections there are other three minor subdivisions: Buddhist Studies in English and Japanese, Non-Buddhist Studies, and Reference Works.

Besides books and tables, the library has two walls dedicated to Xuanshen, founder of Yitong. One wall is partly covered with a wooden inscription, compiled and offered by Rulin and dedicated to Xuanshen. It includes details on her monastic life, her Buddhist education and training, the establishment of the nunnery, her spreading the Dharma, and nurturing female disciples. The opposite wall hosts the Patriarch Hall (zushi tang), a shrine dedicated to Xuanshen that includes two big photos and a bust of the nun. The wooden Guanyin statue on the table in the center deserves mention, too.

The resident nuns and the students of Yitong Buddhist College for Women have not been ordained in Yitong, but in other Buddhist complexes. No full ordination ceremony has been organized in Yitong so far.

**Disciples of Guanyin in Xinzhu**

At the time of my visits at the December 2002, there were more than 20 resident nuns, ranging in age from 19 to 40. Among the nuns, there was only one foreigner only, from Malaysia.

The sounds of bell and drum at 4:00 a.m. mark the beginning of the day in Yitong. The resident nuns usually wake up a bit earlier, around 3:50. The morning service (zaoke) is held from 4:30 to 5:30, and includes the recitation of sūtras in Mandarin, except for Rulin, the abess, who prefers to chant in Taiwanese. Among the recited sūtras, the Surangama Sūtra (Lengyanjing) recurs frequently. A short session of sitting meditation (jingzuo) follows from 5:30 to 5:50. Breakfast takes place from 6:00 to 6:20, and 6:30 to 7:30 is the time for manual routine work. From 7:30 to 11:00, the resident nuns have time for personal duties of the resident nuns, such as studying, teaching, administrative task, etc. Lunch is at 11:15, followed by a short rest period. There is an afternoon period for personal tasks, until dinner at 18:30, taken in the form of “medicine meal” (yaoshi).

The method of cultivation of the resident nuns is both Chan and Pure Land (chanjing shuangxiu), the traditional practice of Chinese Buddhism. As Xingru told me, the practice of Pure Land implies the mindful chanting of Amitabha’s name (nianfo), and aims to calm and stop any defilement. On the other hand, the sitting meditation (jingzuo) is “contemplative meditation.” Cutting off all the defilements in order to realize the Way is the personal mission of the nuns, a mission which they themselves have to accomplish, but then they also have to guide the Buddhist disciples in its accomplishment. Based on the premise that to become an arhat is the goal of the Theravāda and to become a bodhisattva is goal of the Mahāyāna, the abbot explained to me that both personal inner cultivation and concrete practice are needed. At first, one has to take care and strengthen oneself (nei xin), then be concrete and active among people, to realize the bodhisattva mission (wai xin). This is how the nuns of Yitong walk the bodhisattva path, with the purpose of becoming “disciples of Guanyin.” The resident nuns all receive education and training at the Buddhist college.

I asked Rulin about the differences in daily life and practice followed by the nuns in the past and the present. She said that they changed with time and that different historical and economical circumstances caused changes in the nuns’ lives and practice. Nowadays, the so-called “practice of austerities” (kuxiu) is no longer followed.
The Most Outstanding Nuns

The nun Xuanshen (1913-1990) was the founder. She was born in 1913 in Xinzhu and her secular name was Zheng Xiumei. She became a nun she was 9 years old, under the guidance of Dajing, a disciple of Jueli. In 1930, she was assigned as abbess of Yitong. In 1936 she moved to Japan, where she enrolled in a Buddhist institute for women. In the 1940s, after graduation, she was invited to become the abbess of a local nunnery. She returned to Taiwan only in 1947 and continued to be the abbess of Yitong, carrying out a rebuilding which started in 1951 and was completed in 1975.

As for her engagement in the education field, after coming back from Japan, she opened a Buddhist seminary in Xinzhu, with Cihang as guidance, with the aim of nurturing Buddhist talent. The seminary lasted eight years, from 1949 to 1957. Xinzhu Buddhist College was founded in 1957. Xuanshen is also well known because, after her going back to Taiwan from Japan, she invited eminent monks from mainland China to Xinzhu. All the teachings given by these Buddhist masters were translated by Xuanshen into Taiwanese, the most popular language in Xinzhu and therefore better understood by the local people.

As for taking part in Buddhist organizations, besides running Yitong and a Japanese nunnery, she was assigned a position in the Taiwan branch of the Chinese Buddhist Association, and became director of Xinzhu Buddhist Branch Association in 1950. A chanting ceremony (nianfo) in memory of Xuanshen is held every year, on the fifth day of the eleventh month (lunar calendar), the date of her death.

The nun Rulin, the second abbess, was born in 1938; her secular name was Yao Yuque. In 1963, she received the tonsure and one year later she received the full monastic precepts at Dajuesi (at Jilong). In 1968, she graduated from Fuyan Buddhist Institute. Later, she also got a high school degree from a local high school (1977) and a certificate from the Teaching Institute in Taipei (where she attended summer courses) for the kindergarten she opened (1977) and the activities for children she organized. Besides her practice of austerity and strict discipline and devotion to the traditional practice of reciting the sacred scriptures, Rulin cultivated the great compassion and mercy of Guanyin Bodhisattva, especially through her efforts to lead the local children to learn more about the Dharma.

The nun Ruxue (1913-1992) was the abbess of Faguangsi and the founder of Faguang Fojiao Wenhua Yanjiusuo. She was a friend and classmate of Xuanshen before Xuanshen had became a nun, and decided to become a nun at Yitong due to the presence of Xuanshen. Like Xuanshen, she received the full monastic precepts under Dajing. A ceremony in her memory is held in Taipei.

Practicing “Buddhism for the Human Realm”

Various methods to enter the “human realm” are used at Yitong: (1) cooperation between the monastic community and the laity, in the form of help offered by lay volunteers and Dharma services held in Yitong for the local people; (2) short term study retreats for foreigners; (3) the kindergarten and the mission of Buddhist education for children; and (4) humanitarian help to local aborigines.

According to Rulin, Yitong is supposed to be a quiet place for nuns’ cultivation and training, but on certain occasions the main gate is opened and lay disciples are invited to enter and take part in sessions of common practice (gongxiu). The gongxiu sessions are usually held every Saturday (from 7 to 9 p.m.) and one Sunday a month, and on the first and fifteenth of any month (lunar calendar). On these occasions around 250-300 people come and share the Dharma practice, which includes meditation retreats (jing zuo) and retreats of chanting the Buddha’s name (nian fo).

The laity is involved in Yitong Buddhist College as well. For instance, lay people come every day with vegetables and offerings of this sort for the students. They also help with cooking and cleaning, to let the students concentrate on their studies and practice. Each Saturday morning, lay volunteers come to clean and
help prepare for the *gongxiu* sessions held that day. Every volunteer has his/her own duty; some are “regular volunteers” and others come only at certain times. At present there are around 50 volunteers in total, of which 35 are regular. Even the regular volunteers are not allowed to live or sleep in Yitong.

As for foreign students, six young students from Europe came to live and attend Buddhist classes at Yitong for a short time. It is still possible for foreigners to study at Yitong and live outside or live at Yitong and study outside. Because it is new and still in the growing process, Yitong considers these visits as an opportunity for exchanges of views and reciprocal enrichment – an attempt to be in touch with the world outside the gate and learn from it and develop further.

As for the mission of education, the nunnery’s efforts in Buddhist education for children are well known. A kindergarten was founded in 1977 and continued for more than 20 years. That was a good opportunity for the local children to participate in the morning chanting (*zaoke*), to recite Buddhist verses, to take refuge in the three jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha), and attend classes on basic Buddhism. As for the mission of charity, Rulin mentioned the help offered to the aboriginal people in Xinzhu county.

### Parallels between Fayuan and Yitong

Both Fayuan and Yitong are deeply devoted to practice, but also seriously engaged in educational and cultural missions, the former more focused on nuns’ education. Asked which of Yinshun's writings had particular influence on her, Rulin, the abbess of Yitong, answered *The Way to Buddhahood*, while Kuanqian, the abbess of Fayuan, mentioned “*Xuefo sanyao*.” Asked what they think of Buddhism for the Human Realm (renjian fojiao), which is so widespread in Taiwan, and how they, as “disciples of Guanyin” walk the bodhisattva path, both Rulin and Kuanqian said they were following the “Buddhism for the Human Realm.” Rulin is convinced that “Buddhism is among the human beings” and that “Buddhism is meant to go outside the monastery, to make contact with human beings and be concretely active in society.”

My concluding observation is that the “disciples of Guanyin” I met in Xinzhu and described above all reflect perfectly the unprecedented “vitality” of the Buddhist order of nuns in Taiwan, as well as the cooperation between nuns and monks, which is a mark of the gender equality promoted in Taiwan between the male and female branches of the Saṅgha.

### Master Yinshun: Supported by Nuns and Supporter of Nuns

The description of Yinshun as “supported by nuns and supporter of nuns” can be broadened to describe the general situation in contemporary Taiwan. It involves other monks who, in a same way as Yinshun, fled to Taiwan from mainland China in the early 1950s. Of course, I have not mentioned all the female figures who have been close to Yinshun, but the two examples I have treated here, especially the case of the nuns from Yitong, are enough to affirm the existence of a general situation of “Mainland monks supported by nuns and then supporters of nuns.”

Just as Yinshun was helped by the nuns in Yitong when he was settling in Xinzhu and therefore had the opportunity to found first Fuyan Vihara and then Fuyan Buddhist Institute, four Taiwanese nuns – Shi Daxin, Shi Xuanguang, Shi Xiuguan, and Shi Ciguan – became well known for their assistance to the revered Dharma master Cihang. The four nuns and Cihang cooperated in establishing the Maitreya Inner Hall (*Mile neiyuan*), which became the most influential center for Buddhist education, as well as a reference point for the new generation of monks and nuns. A similar situation can be found in southern Taiwan, where Xingyun was helped by the local Buddhist women to establish first Shoushan Buddhist Institute (*Shoushan Foxueyuan*) and then to create the basis of Foguangshan, now a worldwide organization.

In the context of monks helped by nuns and then becoming contributors to reform and innovation in the training and education of nuns, we find that Yinshun was a guide and teacher for the nuns in Yitong,
especially in founding the Xinzhu Buddhist College for Women. Nowadays the resident monks teaching in Fuyan Buddhist Institute, especially Houguan, still contribute to the education of the resident nuns at Yitong and those enrolled at the new-opened Yitong Buddhist College for Women. In line with what Yinshun did in Xinzhu (and Taipei, at Huiri jiantang, where fully ordained and laywomen attended classes and were led into the sea of Dharma), Cihang and Xingyun became well known for their contributions to Taiwanese Buddhist nuns by founding Buddhist institutes for women, sponsoring full monastic ordinations, and creating the phenomenon, unprecedented in the history of Buddhism, of the Taiwanese “disciples of Guanyin”.

NOTES

1. Yinshun, *Fofa shi jiu shi zhi guang*, p. 46.
3. This work is the result of a few visits made to the two nunneries: *Fayuansi* (visited on 2002.12.22), *Yitongsi* (visited on 2002.12.25, 28). I am sincerely grateful to the nuns Kuanqian (*Fayuansi*), Rulin and Xingru (*Yitongsi*) for giving me such an opportunity to visit, and for the compassion and patience which they showed in answering all my questions. For their help and support in this research, I also would like to thank three Dharma friends: Chen Zhiming, Pan Lijian and Martino Dibeltulo. As for the transliteration of the Chinese characters, I have adopted the pinyin system.
4. For a detailed treatise on Yinshun’s theory of gender equality, see Qiu Minjie, “Yinshun daoshi renjian fofiao sixiang de ‘liangxing pingdeng yishi’ jiqi yingxiang.” Available from: <www.awker.com/hongshi/mag/50-6.htm>. Moreover, several works by Yinshun discuss this issue.
8. Yinshun in the same passage also draws a parallel between Buddhism and Catholicism, Guanyin and her great compassion with Maria and her universal love.

10. Yinshun, *Pingfan de yisheng*, p. 124. This judgement referred to Yinshun’s engagement in nuns’ education in Xinzhu, after the establishment of Xinzhu Female Buddhist Institute and his cooperation with Xuanshen. For further details, see the chapter on *Yitongsi*.
11. Ibid., p. 124.
12. Ibid., p. 127.
14. Yinshun used the image of Dharma as a glass of water picked from the sea as a metaphor for *nianfo* practice in the global context. If we take a glassful and think we have got the whole sea is to give up the goal of getting all the water. In the same way, to practice the recitation of Amitabha’s name and take it as the only way to practice the Dharma or, worse, to conceive of it as the whole Dharma is to give up the aim of reaching the boundless depth of the Dharma. The warning is not mistake a part for the whole, with awareness.

16. Ibid., p. 278.


18. Pan Xuan, Kanjian Fotuo zai renjian. Yinshun daoshi zhuan, pp 281-82.

19. The combination of the arts and Dharma is promoted by Kuanqian, a mission heralded by her master Juexin and her father, Yang Yingfeng. This is in line with the thought of Shi Xiaoyun, the nun who founded Hua Fan University. Another similarity is the fact that Kuanqian and Xiaoyun are both descendents of the Tiantai school and Tiantai masters.

20. A detailed description of the contact between Yinshun and Kuanqian is given in Pan Xuan, Kanjian Fotuo zai renjian. Yinshun daoshi zhuan, pp. 275-85.

21. Once he finished the statue and learned more about Yinshun and his thought, Yang Yingfeng took refuge in Yinshun.

22. Kuanqian observed that Indian Buddhism was written when Yinshun was 37 years old; Yang Yingfeng was the same age when he created the small Buddha image.

23. Yinshun mentioned the phenomenon of zhaigu in three volumes: Fofa shi jiu shi zhi guang, p. 344; Jiaozhi jiaodian yu jiaoxue, pp. 18-19; and Pingfan de yisheng, p. 124.


26. For further details, see: Yinshun, Pingfan de yisheng, p. 123.


28. Yinshun also gave teachings, especially lectures from the Lotus Sūtra and Lankavatara Sūtra, besides some classes on his volume Cheng fo zhi dao. Among the other teachers from Fuyan: Shi Yinhai and Shi Yanpei. All this in name to the principle and hope “Teachings could benefit students as well as teachers” (Yinshun, Pingfan de yisheng, p. 119).

29. Huiying recorded two lectures by Yinshun that became the third and eleventh chapters of Three Principles for the Practice of the Dharma. At the end of 1958, she also recorded three speeches held by Yinshun at Shandaosi, titled “Xin wei yi qie fa de zhudaoshe,” “Fojiao zhi niepan guan,” and “Xiu shen zhi dao.”

30. Huiyu was one of the nuns who later moved to Taipei, first to Pingguangsi and then to Jianguo North Road, where she lived with Yinshun.

31. Yinshun numbered five to six, see Yinshun, Pingfan de yisheng, p. 124.

32. Huili recorded two lectures by Yinshun: “Fofa shi jiu shi zhi ren,” in cooperation with Huilun; and the eighth chapter of Foe zai renjian, “Dongfang jingtu fazheng,” in cooperation with Shi Nengdu and then the fourth chapter of Jingtu ya Chan.

33. Huiri jiangtang hosted many women disciples of the Dharma, both lay and monastic disciples of Guanyin, who decided to follow the bodhisatvva path promoted by Yinshun. Yinshun remembered in particular three shanniren (virtuous women): Huitai, Huijiao, and Hongde. For details, see Yinshun, Pingfan de yisheng, pp. 140-44.

34. Once in Taipei, the nuns’ life and mission turned from Xinzhu to elsewhere in Taiwan.

35. Founded as an institute for monks’ education and training in 1969, it became an institute for nuns in 1978, then was later changed again to an institute for monks in 1993. The deans at Fuyuan Buddhist Institute were Shi Yanpei (1969-1972), Shi Zhenhua (1978-1996), Shi Dahang (1996-1999), and Shi Houguan (1999-2005).
Seon Practice and Seon Monasteries for Bhikkhunis in Korea

Wunweol Sunim

Korean Buddhism is relatively unknown to the rest of the world. Despite all the tumultuous events and troubling ordeals throughout Korean history, the unique tradition of Seon practice has been preserved without loss. The strict rules and discipline of the nation's Seon monasteries have kept the tradition alive. Korea's Seon practice is based on Bodhidharma's teachings. He regarded the Buddha's teachings as characteristics of phenomena and emphasized the training of our mind as the source of all phenomena in the world.

Korean bhikkhunīs are highly respected in the Buddhist world, mainly because they have gender-equal opportunities for Seon training and contribute to societal development by directly managing temples. Though Korea's Seon practice finds its roots in China, the principles and rules are fully and more strictly observed in Korea than in China and are now firmly rooted on Korean soil. In this light, it is meaningful to take a look at Seon training methods and the current situation of Seon monasteries in Korea.

An overview of Seon (Zen) practice in Korea may offer important lessons for the secular world. In their Seon practice, sunims (ordained Korean Buddhists) adopt an extremely ascetic lifestyle that includes getting up at 3 a.m. and starting jwaseon, or sitting meditation. What is the theoretical background of their Seon or Zen practice? What are the precepts and how do they put them into practice?

This article will examine the history of Seon in Korea and how the Seon tradition has been passed through generations. It will shed light on the lifestyles, rules, and daily schedules of Korea's Seon masters who have preserved their Seon traditions through the nation's tumultuous history. Finally, it will look closely at the process and methods of Seon training based on reference books such as Seon-yo, Seo-fang, and Seongga-gwi-gam, which are good examples for Seon monasteries.

The Current Situation of Seon Monasteries and Gan-wha Seon Practice

Korea adopted Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Jogye order, which is the largest Buddhist order in Korea, emphasizes: (1) an independent transmission apart from doctrine or scripture, (2) directly pointing to the human mind, and (3) self-realization to become a Buddha. This suggests the ultimate goal of Korean Buddhism, which is to attain Buddhahood by pointing to the human mind and reaching closer to one's self-nature, apart from the texts. The Seon Buddhist School survived the anti-Buddhist policies taken by the Chosun dynasty that lasted about 500 years, because monks of the Seon school had a well-organized system and strict rules through which they were able to maintain autonomy. Another reason for their survival is their spirit of imperturbability and thrifty lifestyle.

During in the Tang Dynasty in China, the Chinese Zen master Ma-tsu Tao-i first referred to a Zen monastery as sun-bul-zang, meaning a place to select Buddhas. Ever since, Zen monasteries have been
recognized as places where Buddhist monastics are able to concentrate on their Zen training.

### Number of Seon Monasteries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seon-won ju</th>
<th>Keun-bang nae</th>
<th>Keun-bang oe</th>
<th>Oe-ho</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chong-rim¹</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seon-wons for bhikkhus</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seon-wons for bhikkunīs</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1,808</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above from *Seon-sa-bang-ham-rok* shows the current situation of Seon centers during the 2003 winter retreat. According to the table, the number of Seon centers for *bhikkunīs* is far fewer than the number for *bhikkhus*. The number of *bhikkunīs* participating in retreats, however, is close to that of *bhikkhus*. As a result, the nation’s Seon training facilities are not adequate to fully accommodate *bhikkunīs* and some *bhikkunīs* have had to complete their retreats in inadequate meditation facilities.

Most of the participants of these retreats are first-timers or senior *bhikkunīs*, while the number of middle-aged participants is small. Some middle-aged *bhikkunīs* are called upon to run temples or to take up positions in small private institutions. Considering that reality, institutionalized measures are needed to ensure that middle-aged Seon *bhikkunīs* are capable of teaching and training young *bhikkunīs*.

It was during the Tang Dynasty in China that a designated training place called a Chan monastery first appeared. *Seon-mun-gyu-sik*, written by Pai-chang Huai-hai, set forth the foundation for those facilities. To summarize, the book discusses the following topics:

1. Separation of Seon monasteries from Vinaya temples and the formulation of Seon monastery rules;
2. An enlightened elder resident monk, called *jang-ro*, who lives in the chief monk’s room;
3. Construction of a Buddha hall without a Buddhist sanctum;
4. Construction of a *seung-dang*, or Buddhist monastery where *bhikkunīs* reside and practice;
5. Dharma teachings by the *jang-ro*;
6. *Dharmahara*, or diet in harmony with the rules of Buddhism;
7. *Bo-chung-bup*, or working together;
8. Establishment of ten duties and responsibilities for *bhikkunīs*;
9. Disciplinary measures for anyone who violates Seon monastery rules;
10. Separation of Seon monasteries initiated by Pai-chang Huai-hai.

The following explanations may help in better understanding the text. *Bo-chung-bup* is defined, according to *Seon-won-chong-ram*, as “uniting forces from the upper and the lower,” meaning that all the members of the community, from the *jang-ro* to the rank-and-file *bhikkunīs* are obliged to work. Currently, most Seon monasteries grow much of their own food in order to maintain some degree of self-sufficiency. When preparing food for a large-scale event or cleaning the temple, all the members of the community work together.
“Dharma offering” means having meals using *patra*, or bowls, in the main community room in the early morning and around midday. Dressed in their formal robes, the *bhikkhunis* reflect on the origin and meaning of taking food and read five verses to remind themselves of the appropriate attitude toward and meaning of the offerings. An equal amount of food is offered to each member of the community.

During retreat periods, usually held twice a year, *bhikkhunis* refrain from going outside the monastery and strictly keep to the daily routine. In most cases, each retreat lasts for three months, but some temples operate a retreat for a whole year, apart from one or two months. At the start, the end, and every fifteen days, the community members listen to Dharma teachings from the head monk or another teacher.

*Yong-sang-bang*, the bulletin board on the wall of the main room, announces the specific duties allocated to each person. It is tacitly understood that each person does her utmost to fulfill their duties during the retreat period. Usually one *bhikkhuni*, who is considered to be more capable and may have been certified in her meditation capabilities, is selected by the head monk to teach the less experienced. To inspect trainees’ meditation capabilities and Dharma learning, Seon masters issue *jeon-bup-ge* to them.

At the mid-point of a retreat, the head monk inspects the trainees’ progress in their Seon practice. From time to time, all the community members go climbing together as part of their practice. Special periods of intensive practice are established that consist of intensive Seon practice for a prolonged period of time. These special practice periods are considered as intrepid *virya*, or added effort and determination. During these times, practitioners neither lie down on the floor nor sleep, in order to further intensify their ascetic practice. “Added-effort *virya*” extends the practice time until twelve o’clock midnight.

During the *posal*, or confession session that is held every fifteen days, trainees confess any violations of the rules as they recited the *Rules of Discipline of a Bodhisattva* contained in the *Brahma Net Sutra*. At the *pravarana* session that is held a day before the end of the retreat, trainees repent their wrongdoings during the retreat or share their views on monastery life with their colleagues. The head monk or senior monk collects and examines the opinions. The retreat wraps up with teachings given by an invited *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni*.

**The Rules and Daily Schedules of Seon Monasteries**

Although most monasteries follow the same set of rules, some variations can be seen. *Seon-won-chong-ram* provides three-year community rules for Mang-wol temple as follows.

1. Holding the Jong-Seung ceremony on the first day of every month;
2. Reciting the Vinaya or rules of Mahasthamaprapta and Prātimokṣa every fifteenth day;
3. Showing *gan-bwa-jeong-ro* every twentieth day;
4. No meals in the afternoon;
5. No words except in emergencies;
6. No outings unless a parent or master is gravely ill or dies;
7. Seon trainees must not intervene in any affairs of the temple *bhikkhunis*.

For a deeper understanding, “holding the *jong-seung* ceremony” means listening to Dharma teachings from the head monk. “Reciting the Vinaya or rules of Mahasthamaprapta and Prātimokṣa” means holding a confession ceremony that includes the recitation of *Rules of Discipline of a Bodhisattva* contained in the *Brahma Net Sutra*. “Virya with no words” denotes keeping silent until the end of the day, except when reciting the Buddha’s name. *Oe-ho-dae-jung* indicates an exceptional case in which an outing is allowed to purchase goods the community needs. “Meditating community” requires concentrating on *virya* with no involvement in external affairs.
Trainees should follow the daily schedule as follows.

3 a.m.  Getting up, holding the *do-ryang-seok* and *jong-seong* ceremonies\(^2\)
3:40 a.m.  Entrance into Seon after chanting
5 a.m.  End of meditation period
6 a.m.  Breakfast
7 a.m.  Entrance into Seon
10 a.m.  End of meditation period
10:30 a.m.  Lunch
11 a.m.  Dharma teachings
1 p.m.  Entrance into Seon
4 p.m.  End of meditation period
6 p.m.  Entrance into Seon after prayer chanting
9 or 10 p.m.  End of meditation period and sleep

Working with the Saṅgha usually occurs in the afternoon. All members of the community often participate in a ceremony of reciting the *Vijra Sūtra*.

**The Introduction and Spread of Seon Practice in Korea**

Since the time that Buddhism was introduced to Korea in 372 CE via China, there have been various forms of meditation practice based on Mahāyāna and Hinayāna Dharma śāstras, but it is the Seon practice of the Seon school that has kept Korea's Soen tradition alive. The Seon master Do-ui traveled to China in 785, during the Shilla Dynasty, and studied under Seo-dang-ji-jang (735-814) who was a disciple of the great Chan master Ma-tsu Tao-i. He returned to Korea in 821 (in the 13th year of King Hun-duk) and initiated the Ku-sahn Seon tradition.

Historical research shows that Ma-tsu-Tao-I studied and mastered Zen practice under Nan-yueh Huai-jang and gained the Buddha's mind seal. He produced about 130 talented disciples, including Pai-chang Huai-hai, Dae-hae, and eight of the nine great Seon masters of the Silla dynasty.

From the start of the Koryo dynasty to the time of King Kwang-jong, the Seon of silent contemplation of the Ts’ao-tung school, known as Mook-jo Seon, dominated the Buddhist community. Great monks such as Fa-yen-tsung under Young-myung Young-ju (904-975) contributed to the spread of Seon practice.

Reportedly, during the eleventh century many monks of the Seon school joined the Tien-tai School (the School of the Celestial Platform) established by Mahabodhi Ui-cheon (1055-1101), which greatly diminished the communities of the existent Seon temples. Yi Ja-hyeon and Zen master Hye-jo tried to spread the Seon of contemplation with words (Gan-hwa -Seon), putting stress on the *Surangama Sūtra* or the *Sūtra of the Heroic Ones*.

As the nine Seon traditions of the Shilla dynasty died out during the generation of Won-eung Hak-il and Dae-kam Tan-yeon, and the Tien-tai School also lost its vitality after it broke into two sects, Beop-sa and So-ja, the National Master Bo-Jo Ji-Nul (1158-1210) of the Koryo dynasty initiated Su-seon-sa. This tradition ceased to exist after Go-bong, the last monk of the sect, died. In the last years of the Shilla dynasty, the Buddhist community experienced great difficulties, including confrontation, division, widespread superstition, and mysticism. To make matters worse, Confucian philosophy from China (*ju-ja*) and great scholars of Confucianism directly challenged Buddhism and the Buddhist community.

Around the time of King Kong-min’s enthronement, some Korean Zen monks shared a close relationship with Chinese monks of the Lin-chi school, a Chinese Seon school. Among them were Tae-go Bo-woo (1301-1382), Seon-gak Hye-geun (1320-1376), and Baek-un Gyeong-han (1299-1375). Tae-go Bo-woo,
in particular, went to China during the Yuan Dynasty and experienced great enlightenment while he was studying under Master Seok-ok Cheong-gong, who belonged to the Seok-gi sect of the Lin-chi school. Because Bo-woo taught the tradition of the Lin-chi school to over 1000 disciples in the last years of the Koryo dynasty, the Lin-chi school succeeded and led the Korean Seon tradition. The Lin-chi school pursues the Zen of a Buddha of non-doing with the goal of transcending life and death.

The Chosun Dynasty was the worst period for Korean Buddhism, because the dynasty politically repressed Buddhism and imposed economic disadvantages, including confiscating land privately owned by temples. As a result, various sects of the Korean Buddhism community disappeared or were forced to merge, while the social status of Buddhist monks fell significantly.

During the period of Japanese colonial rule, marriage was temporarily encouraged for Buddhist monks. The Jogye order, based on the traditions of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, was created in 1962 and has grown significantly.

An historical perspective tells us that divisions in the Buddhist schools and sects, a lack of discipline among the monks, and the popularity of mystical practices contributed to the loss of Buddhism’s position of social leadership in Korea.

How to Practice Gan-hwa Seon

The ongoing process of globalization in the 21st century has introduced new forms of practice to Korea, such as those from the Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The tradition of Korean Seon monasteries, however, has its root in Gan-hwa Seon, which says, “Don’t bring any understanding or knowledge with you when you come in.” This phrase can be found on the gate of large Buddhist temples in Korea, proving that the main thesis of the Seon school, despite all the ordeals it has gone through, has consistently been handed down.

Gan-wha, meaning “see the hua-tou,” is a key phrase used by an enlightened master to a disciple in practice. When a sudden and unexpected realization of the meaning of the hua-tou occurs, and subsequent questions follow constantly, the phrase comes to life. The most important thing in practicing Gan-hwa Seon is to keep asking about the direct meaning of the phrase. This is referred to as gan-hwa, or seeing the hwa-tou, and the whole process is called Gan-hwa Seon practice.

The hwa-tou is also called gong-an (koan), originally a term for the documents of public institutions. Just as public documents become a strict standard for judging and processing the work of public institutions, the hwa-tou becomes an important tool to check whether Seon trainees have gained realization.

Seon trainees can eventually begin full Gan-hwa Seon practice when they meet a master who is able to stimulate them to raise questions about a key phrase. Seon-yo, a summary of Seon practice written by Gobong Won-myo, a Chinese Zen master who lived during the transition period from the Sung dynasty to the Yuan dynasty, describes the objectives of Seon as follows: “Adopt realization as its principle through perfect mindfulness.” This phrase basically says that Gan-hwa Seon trainees take as their ultimate goal becoming a Buddha during this life. That is why they practice all day long in Seon monasteries and devote all of their attention to meditation.

To practice with the hwa-tou requires great faith, great doubt, and determined purpose, according to Seon-yo and Seon-ga-gwi-gam. Seo-jang offers the following teachings to fend off nihilistic and eternalist views:

Trainees should guard against falling into the trap of nihilistic and eternalist views. The nihilistic view removes the exquisite and bright aspects of the mind, cares only about śnyat (emptiness), and is hooked by the tranquility of Seon, while the eternalist view fails to realize that all dharma are empty, and get stuck in the conditioned things of the secular world.
Deuk-ryeok-cheo was a place to become replenished with new will power during the practice. Seon-yo describes it as follows:

If the six emotions, the six kinds of consciousness, the four primary elements of the body, the five aggregates or skandhas of the self, all the mountains and rivers, every creature in the universe are converted into a mountain of questions and brought to the trainee, peace and comfort will come to him or her. Once that happens, his or her life will be all about those questions, whenever they walk, sit, clothe, eat, excrete, see, hear, or act. As the trainee keeps finding answers to those questions, he or she reaches a point where the practice itself is increasingly less tough. That is the point where they can make a further effort in their practice, and questions spontaneously come up to the mind of the trainee without effort, a new hwa-tou arises, and all the questions and hwa-tous weave a whole story with no room for wrong-mindedness.

“Tidings reaching home” represents the stage in one’s Seon practice when one is close to realization. Seon-yo provides a definition as follows:

When they are unable to practice meditation anymore for even a moment and experience a disruption in the flow of thoughts, all the kleśa or afflicting emotions suddenly and unexpectedly dissipate, and torpor and distractions also disappear... They feel as dull as a clod of mud or as dumb as a wooden doll for all day long. They feel as if facing a huge barrier. This experience signifies tidings reaching home. The end is never far away, and they just have to pull and control themselves more tightly to practice more and wait for the time.

Seon-yo offers a piece of advice on how to avoid distractions:

Remove all the afflictions from your mind, make your mind as cold as ice, clean it pure and spotless, make sure your will power last for tens of thousands of years, keep guarding yourself against afflictions as if you are a ghost guarding a dead body. When the questions explode suddenly and unexpectedly, they will surprise the heaven and move the earth. So make your best and utmost efforts in your practice.

Seo-Jang by Dae-hye Jong-go, written in the Chinese Sung Dynasty, gives a very brief explanation of Gan-hwa Seon practice:

There is no cut of thoughts and no room for afflictions because every thought lies in the middle of prajña or wisdom.

The expression “every thought lying in the middle of prajña” means the state of emptiness, “no room for afflictions” refers to thinking of the hwa-tou, and “no cut of thoughts” signifies continuous practice with the hwa-tou with undivided attention. This is consistent with the samdhi of oneness and samdhi of one act in the Yook-jo-dan Sūtra or the Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch.

Cautions in the practice with the hwa-tou are found in the Seon-sa-gwi-gam by the great Buddhist monk Seo-san (1520-1604):

Trainees in the hwa-tou practice are often caught in ten traps. Among them are making a guess based on the superficial meanings of the word, developing a habit of raising the eyebrows and opening and closing the eyes, being stuck at the road of words, taking excerpts from related books as evidence,
trying to figure out an answer to the word-head where it arises, seeking an answer where there is none, presupposing if there is an answer or not, presupposing that there is truly no answer, trying to understand the word-head through reasoning, and being misled into believing that simple waiting may lead to realization.

According to the Seon-ga-gwi-gam, trainees should pursue answers to their hwa-tou as seriously and sincerely as a cat chasing a mouse, a hungry man seeking rice, a thirsty person wanting water, or a baby searching for its mother. Keeping the practice in that way may lead to realization.

The next step to realization is to learn Seon teachings, seek approval from Seon masters who have inherited each Seon tradition, and study Buddhist sūtras from the Tripitaka Koreana to accumulate merit and wisdom, so as to lead and teach all living beings.

**Conclusion**

Though people come from different backgrounds, we can become one through our minds, developing a mind of complete emptiness. The mind itself is wisdom and happiness. The training in Korean Seon monasteries puts into practice “non-doing” and exercises prajña wisdom to cut the cycle of evil. This prajña wisdom acts to remove all causes and conditions and to permanently end the cycle of rebirth.

In the United States, Japanese Zen masters and the Kouk-seon-do organizations specialize in teaching Korea’s traditional breathing and meditation, spreading Buddhist ideas with phenomenal success. Now is the time for the Jogye order to develop ways to make their Seon practice appeal to people in various walks of life.

**NOTES**

1. A chong-rim is a comprehensive education facility equipped with gang-wons for sūtra study, seon-wons for Zen practice, and yul-wons for studying Vinaya, the rules of monastic discipline.

2. The do-ryang-seok is a ceremony to wake monastics up early in the morning with the sound of a wooden clapper and sūtra recitation. The jong-seong ceremony includes sūtra recitation with the sound of bells.

3. The Tripitaka Koreana consists of more than 80,000 wood blocks used for printing the complete collection of Buddhist scriptures, rules, and treatises.
Crossing Over the Gender Boundary in Gray Rubber Shoes: A Study on Myoom Sunim’s Buddhist Monastic Education

Inyoung Chung (Sukdham Sunim)

In the patriarchal Korean Buddhist tradition, no formal Buddhist educational institution existed for nuns from the Choson period (1392–1910) until 1956. While Korean monks formally studied Buddhist texts in literarv Chinese in the monastic academic setting, Korean nuns were not educated in formal academic setting until early 1956. Although nuns were excluded from the formal monastic educational system, Myoom Sunim (1932–), as a Korean nun, officially completed traditional Korean Buddhist monastic education in 1956 and became one of the two distinguished contemporary educators for nuns in Korea.

In this paper, I investigate how Myoom Sunim, by formally completing traditional Korean Buddhist monastic education, broke social barriers that had historically excluded nuns from formal educational institution.

Myoom Sunim was born as the daughter of Ch’ongdam Sunim (1902–71) in the midst of the Japanese colonial period (1910–45). To escape being drafted as a “comfort woman” in 1945, at age 14, Myoom Sunim entered Sangryon-Seonwon (Two Lotus Seon Hall) at Taesung-sa (Mahāyāna Monastery), where her father, Ch’ongdam Sunim, was practicing Seon meditation. Myoom Sunim testifies that her decision to become a nun arose out of her desire to learn, as well as from her association with Songch’ol Sunim, who promised to teach her to become a Dharma teacher.

In the early spring of 1949, while Myoom Sunim was engaged in an intensive training of Seon meditation with four nuns under Songch’ol Sunim and Ch’ongdam Sunim at Pong’am-sa (Male Phoenix Mountain Cave Monastery) in Kyonyang Bukdo province, she was told to return to Yunp’il-am (Gift Given to Writing Hermitage) due to the imminent threat of the Korean War (1950–53). During the Korean War, Myoom Sunim wandered around the area of Pusan, the temporary wartime capital of South Korea. She was then told to move to Pot’a-am (Potala Hermitage) near T’ongdo-sa (Passing Through Monastery) to study the Chinese Precepts and Decorum for Śrāmaṇeriṇīs (Samini yurui) under Ch’au’n Sunim (1911–92), a prominent Vinaya master in Korea. After completing her study on this text, Myoom Sunim continued to study the Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa (Piguni kebun) of the Caturvarga or Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Sabun–yul; Chin. Ssu-fen lü). Ch’au’n Sunim taught each of the 348 monastic rules in the Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa to the nuns with his own detailed explanations. Myoom Sunim also studied the Brahma Net Sūtra (Ponnang–kyong, Sanskrit: Brāhmaṇajāla Sūtra, Ch.in: Fan–wang ching), which contains the 10 major and 48 minor precepts to be observed by bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

After studying Precepts and Decorum for Śrāmaṇeriṇīs, Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa, and Brahma Net Sūtra, Myoom Sunim realized that her knowledge of Buddhism was superficial, for she had not studied Buddhism systematically since becoming a nun. She felt that she was not able to hold her steadfast beliefs in Buddhism without knowing what the Buddha taught. She decided to study Buddhist texts systematically.
Ch’ongdam Sunim and Songch’ol Sunim if she could study Buddhist texts. They agreed and Songch’ol Sunim wrote a letter\textsuperscript{14} to Unho Sunim (1892-1980),\textsuperscript{15} one of the prominent kangsa (lecturers) in Korea.\textsuperscript{16} Myoom Sunim then went to see Unho Sunim at Pomo-sa (Holy Fish Monastery) in Pusan to get permission to study under him.\textsuperscript{17} Myoom Sunim showed Songch’ol Sunim’s letter to Unho Sunim,\textsuperscript{18} who gave his permission. Myoom Sunim’s older Dharma sister, Hyegwan Sunim,\textsuperscript{19} volunteered to financially support Myoom Sunim, as well as Myoyong Sunim\textsuperscript{20} and Myohi Sunim.\textsuperscript{21} In November 1952, Myoom Sunim went to study Buddhist texts under Unho Sunim at the Buddhist institute for monks at Tonghak-sa (Eastern Crane Monastery) in Chungch’ong Namdo Province.\textsuperscript{22} In the early 1950s there was no Buddhist educational institution for nuns in Korea, thus Myoom Sunim had to study under monk masters at the Buddhist institute for monks.

While Myoom Sunim was residing at Mita-am (Amitābha Hermitage) with six other nuns, she commuted from Mita-am to the distant Tonghak-sa.\textsuperscript{23} Unho Sunim first taught the *Mencius* (Maengja, Ch. *Men-tzu*) and the *Analects of Confucius* (Nono, Ch. *Lun-yü*) to the nuns because he believed that studying the *Mencius* and the *Analects of Confucius* would help nuns understand the world and provide them with some basic knowledge in literary Chinese.\textsuperscript{24} Myoom Sunim recalls that it was extremely difficult for her to study the *Mencius* and the *Analects of Confucius* because she had never received a systematic education in the Confucian texts in literary Chinese. She says that she studied extremely hard to keep up with her classes. And, since she realized that without knowing Chinese characters she would not be able to continue to study Chinese Buddhist texts, she mainly concentrated on memorizing Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{25}

After studying the *Mencius* and the *Analects of Confucius*, Myoom Sunim started to learn the first chapter of the *Ch’imun* or *Ch’imun kyonghun* (*Admonitions to Gray-robed Monks*) of the elementary śrāmaṇerīkā course (*sami-kwa*).\textsuperscript{26} In the autobiographical novel, *Gray Rubber Shoes* (*Hoesaek komusin*), Myoom Sunim does not specifically elaborate on how she studied Buddhist texts under Unho Sunim at Tonghak-sa. In my interview with Myoom Sunim, she told me that, even though she studied Buddhist texts under Unho Sunim, she and the other nuns had a residence completely separate from the monks. Monks always lived with Unho Sunim at the Buddhist institute for monks, whereas nuns always stayed at a nunnery and commuted to the Buddhist institute. The monks and the nuns went to Unho Sunim’s room to have their classes at different times. For example, the monks would have their classes early in the morning and the nuns in the afternoon. Or sometimes the nuns would have their classes in the morning and the monks in the afternoon. The style of education at the Buddhist institute for monks at Tonghak-sa was based on the style of education of the study hall (*sodang*) or the traditional Confucian Academy.\textsuperscript{27} Myoom Sunim was required to memorize each section of the *Ch’imun* in every lesson and to recite it in front of Unho Sunim without opening the text. After checking on Myoom Sunim’s memorization of the previous lesson of the section, Unho Sunim read out the passages of the section of the *Ch’imun* for the new lesson. Myoom Sunim had to recognize the pronunciation and meaning of the individual Chinese characters in each passage and read aloud the same passages that Unho Sunim had just read. Unho Sunim provided Korean particles between the Chinese phrases, translated the Chinese passages into Korean, and added his own elaborate explanations on each passage with examples and similes.\textsuperscript{28} After receiving her lesson on the section of the *Ch’imun* in the morning, Myoom Sunim read the same section over and over throughout the day until she completely memorized it. She was required to memorize both the Chinese sentences in Sino-Korean pronunciation and the Korean translation of each section of the *Ch’imun* at every lesson.

When Myoom Sunim finished the first chapter of the *Ch’imun*, Chapter on Exertion in Study (*Myonhak pyon*), she was told to teach the first chapter of the *Ch’imun* to junior nuns. Myoom Sunim insisted that she was not yet qualified to teach the *Ch’imun* to the nuns, but Unho Sunim repeatedly encouraged her and she eventually agreed. She could translate the *Ch’imun* into Korean easily, but she was not able to add her own explanation to each passage of the *Ch’imun*. Myoom Sunim believes that, even though she was not quite qualified to teach the *Ch’imun* to the nuns, Unho Sunim perhaps wished to train her as a kangsa for nuns in
the future, bearing in mind that Songch’ol Sunim had asked him to make her into a kanga.29

While she was teaching the Ch’imun to the nuns, she completed her study of the Buddhist texts in the Sajip-kwa (The Fourfold Collection Course); Sojang (Letters),30 Doso (Ch’ an Preface),31 Sonyo (Essentials of Ch’ an),32 and Choryo (Excerpts).33 During her study of the four texts of the Fourfold Collection Course, Myoom Sunim learned from Unho Sunim how to compose short basic Chinese sentences. After teaching the four texts to Myoom Sunim, Unho Sunim left Tonghak-sa in August 1953.34

On September 25, 1953, Unho Sunim moved to Kumsu-sa (Golden Water Monastery) in Pusan. Myoom Sunim followed him to continue her studies under him with two other nuns, Myohi Sunim and Myoyong Sunim.35 Staying in a room at Changgun-am (General Hermitage) which was near Kumsu-sa, she studied under Unho Sunim for a month, commuting from Changgun-am to Kumsu-sa on foot.36 Unho Sunim moved to Tongdo-sa,37 and Myoom Sunim followed him and stayed closely at Pot’a-am where she shared a room with Myohi Sunim and Myoyong Sunim. She studied the Nung’om-kyong (Ch. Leng- yen ch ‘ing), or the Heroic March Samādhi Sūtra38 of the Sagyo-kwa (the Four Teachings Course).39

Myoom Sunim describes her life at Pot’a-am as continual hardship. She had to gather firewood in the mountains, beg for alms, cook by herself, and commute from Pot’a-am to Tongdo-sa on foot to have class. For every lesson she was required to memorize both the Chinese sentences and the Korean translation of each section in the Nung’om-kyong. She stayed up late at night to review her lesson and prepare for the next lesson. Every morning she had a test on the previous section of her lesson with Unho Sunim.40

While Myoom Sunim was studying the Nung’om-kyong at Tongdo-sa, she did not have enough candles to light up her room to study at night, so she gathered the pieces of candles thrown away at the temples.41 She put several pieces of candles into a used can, made a cotton wick, put it in the middle of the can, and lit it in her room, so she could study. After staying up late at night, her face and nostrils were stained with soot from the smoke of the candles. Although her life at Pot’a-am was difficult, she reveals that she was in bliss for being able to learn the Buddhist teaching.42 In Kim’s manuscript Myoom Sunim explains that the nuns at Pot’a-am had different lifestyles, though they resided together. One nun made her living by washing and sewing clothes for a male master at Tongdo-sa and often went out for begging for alms.43

As Worun Sunim observed, the nuns had many more disadvantages than the monks did in studying Buddhist texts under Unho Sunim because the nuns had to cover their own food and living expenses.44 Myoom Sunim told me that the meals for the monks at the Buddhist institute were provided by the married monks at the monasteries. At the very least, monks at the Buddhist institute did not have to go out to beg for food because the monasteries generally owned lands. In the middle of her study on the Nung’om-kyong, Myongsong Sunim45 joined Myoom Sunim’s class. Myoom Sunim moved to the biggest room at Pot’a-am and shared the room with Myongsong Sunim, Myohi Sunim, and Myoyong Sunim.46

After Unho Sunim finished teaching the Nung’om-kyong to Myoom Sunim, on March 13, 1955, he moved to Yonhwa-sa (Lotus Flower Monastery)47 in Chinju, the hometown of Ch’ongdam Sunim and Myoom Sunim.48 Myoom Sunim moved to Tosol-am (Tuśita Hermitage) which was far from Yonhwa-sa, and commuted from Tosol-am to Yonhwa-sa on foot to study the Taesung kisinnon (Skt. Mahāyāna- sādadhīpāda Śastra; Ch. Tā-shēng ch’i-hsin lun) or the Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna.49 Myoom Sunim says that the Taesung kisinnon contains the entire Buddhist philosophy. The Buddhist theory and logic of the Taesung kisinnon was difficult for her to understand and it took nine months for her to finish the Taesung kisinnon.50

After Unho Sunim finished teaching the Taesung kisinnon to Myoom Sunim at Yonhwa-sa, in November 1955, he left for Haein-sa (Ocean Samādhi Monastery).51 Myoom Sunim moved to Yaksu-am (Medicine Water Hermitage) near Haein-sa with her Dharma niece śrāmaṇerikā, Tosong Sunim. At Yaksu-am Myoom Sunim taught the Buddhist texts of the elementary level to Tosong Sunim. At that time thirty nuns lived at Yaksu-am and had to provide rice for themselves since the Yaksu-am nunnercy owned no land. The rice provided by each nun was boiled in a huge iron cauldron and served inside a kunbang (huge room), the
biggest room at Yaksu-am. All of the nuns at Yaksu-am performed the bowl meal as a congregation in the kunbang.

At this time, Myoom Sunim started studying the *Kumkang-kyong* (Skt. *Vajrachedika Sūtra*; Ch. *Chinkang ching*) or the *Diamond Sūtra* under Unho Sunim at Haein-sa, commuting from Yaksu-am to Haeinsa on foot. She enjoyed studying the *Kumkang-kyong*, as it contains the essence of the Buddhist wisdom.

After completing her study of the *Kumkang-kyong*, she continued to study the *Wonkag-kyong* (Ch. *Yünan-chüeh ching*) or the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, which bears the Buddhist teachings of the practice for the bodhisattva’s action of wisdom.

After Unho Sunim finished teaching the *Wonkag-kyong* to Myoom Sunim, he told Myoom Sunim that he wanted to take some rest. Several months later Myoom Sunim decided to study the *Hwaom-kyong* (Skt. *Avataµsaka-Sūtra*; Ch. *Hua-yen ching*) under Kyongbong (1885-1969) Sunim at Tonghak-sa - where fifty nuns were studying under Kyongbong Sunim. Tonghak-sa became the first *bhikṣūkangwon* (lecture hall for nuns) or the Buddhist Institute for Nuns. At this time, Unho Sunim moved to T’ongdo-sa again to teach monks.

As soon as she arrived at Tonghak-sa, Kyongbong Sunim told her to translate the Chinese *sūtra* into Korean in front of him. She fluently translated the Chinese *sūtra* into Korean. After checking Myoom Sunim’s ability to read Buddhist scripture, Kyongbong Sunim immediately appointed her as a *chunggang* (lit. a middle lecturer) or a teaching assistant to the head lecturer. While she was teaching the Buddhist texts of the *Sami-kwa* and *Sajip-kwa* to the nuns, she studied the *Hwaom-kyong* under Kyongbong Sunim.

Myoom Sunim describes her study of the Chinese translation in 80 Scrolls of the *Hwaom-kyong* under Kyongbong Sunim in the style of education at *sodang*. She prepared for class by translating as many pages of the *Hwaom-kyong* as she could before her class. Every morning she went to Kyongbong Sunim’s room with the pages of the *Hwaom-kyong* she had prepared. She and Kyongbong Sunim exchanged questions and answers on the passages of the *Hwaom-kyong* in the style of a seminar. She told me that at this time she was the only student of the *Taegye-kwa* (the Great Teachings Course), the highest course in the curriculum at the Buddhist Institute for Nuns at Tonghak-sa.

On April 5, 1956, Myoom Sunim finally received *chon’gang* (lit. transmission of lecture), an authorization to teach Buddhist texts, from Kyongbong Sunim, and became a *bhikṣunī kangsa*. In December 1957, Unho Sunim again conferred the formal *chon’gang* on Myoom Sunim at T’ongdo-sa.

After completing her study at a traditional Korean Buddhist monastic educational institution, on the eighteenth of the third month of 1958 Myoom Sunim was ordained as a *bhikṣunī* under Ch’aun Sunim at T’ondo-sa. In February 1996, she graduated from Dongguk University, a Buddhist university in Seoul. On March 15, 1966 Myoom Sunim moved to Unmun-sa (Cloud Gate Monastery) in Kyonysang bukdo province. Her full-time teaching career began with a four-year stint as a *kangsa* at Unmun-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns between 1966 and 1970. In 1974 Myoom Sunim established the Pongnyong-sa (Serving Peace Monastery) Buddhist Institute for Nuns in the city of Suwon in collaboration with her elder Dharma sister, Myojon (1915-2003) Sunim. Since her establishment of the Pongnyong-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns, she has produced more than seven hundred graduates. Today, there are one hundred twenty student nuns undertaking their religious training and education under Myoom Sunim at the Pongnyong-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns.

In this paper, I have focused my study on Myoom Sunim’s Buddhist monastic education in Korea between 1952 and 1956. Needless to say, Myoom Sunim’s remarkable struggle to study Buddhist texts under her monk masters has well demonstrated her ability to break the social barriers that had excluded nuns from the formal educational institutions. She made a breakthrough in the history of education for nuns in the male-dominated Korean Buddhist tradition. In the early 1950s, Korean nuns were not encouraged to study Buddhist scriptures, but Myoom Sunim has played a leading role in the creation of the Buddhist education for nuns and has served as a role model for contemporary Korean nuns.
The view of the Korean monk masters toward nuns in the 1950s is noteworthy, and it sheds new light on the study of nuns in the particular historical and social context of Korea. The majority of the feminist scholars in Buddhism hold the view that, throughout the Buddhist history, monks in every Buddhist tradition were generally not supportive of nuns. Yet, my study on Korean nuns shows that Korean monk masters in the 1950s played a major role for educating Korean nuns, with the hopes that nuns would play vital roles to rebuild Korean Buddhism. These monks made great efforts to educate nuns despite the predominant belief that women and nuns held an inferior and powerless position in the male-dominated traditional Korean Buddhist community.

As discussed earlier, Ch'ongdam Sunim, Songch'ol Sunim, and Ch'aun Sunim were eager to train and educate nuns and believed that nuns should lead their own saṅgha in the future. Unho Sunim and Kyongbong Sunim also committed themselves to educating nuns, with beliefs that Korean nuns with education would have a bright future. In other words, Korean monk masters foresaw in the dark age of Korean Buddhism that Korean nuns would make important contributions to the rebuilding of the Korean Buddhism and believed that their devotion to educating nuns would open up opportunities for both Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṅghas to flourish in Korea. And indeed, courageous nuns, like Myoom Sunim, through actively pursuing Buddhist monastic education and themselves becoming influential teachers in their own right, have opened the door for other nuns to follow in their footsteps.

1. Yi Myoom, Hoesaek komusin (Gray Rubber Shoes), ed. Yun Ch'ongkwang (Seoul: Sikongsa Publishing Company, 2002). In the appendix of the komusin, Myoom's nephew and a professor at Pusan University in Korea, Kim Yonghwan, writes that he first made a chronology of Myoom's life to record her life story. Kim states that it took a week to tape-record her whole life story, which he then transcribed with minor editing. Realizing that it would be difficult for the general reader to understand Myoom's life story, Myoom and Kim hired Yun Ch'ongkwang, a Buddhist professional radio drama writer. To make the story more accessible to everyone, Yun created an autobiographical novel based on Myoom's testimony. I personally interviewed Myoom between June 6-26, 2003 at the Pongnyong-sa (Serving Peace Monastery) Buddhist Institute for Nuns and received from her the original manuscript that contains her interview with Kim. In this paper, I primarily use the Hoesaek komusin as a main source to discuss Myoom's life, but I also refer to Kim's original manuscript and my own personal interviews with Myoom whenever it is appropriate. I studied the Hwaom-kyong (Skt. Avatamsaka-Sūtra), or Flower Garland Sūtra, under Myoom at the Pongnyong-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns in 1975. I will discuss the Pongnyong-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns and the Hwaom-kyong in detail later in this paper.

2. The Korean names in this paper are written in the Korean way: family name first, followed by personal name. Korean personal names are commonly made up by combining meaningful or symbolic words. While the Western transliteration style usually uses a hyphen to indicate a Korean personal name, it is never written that way in Korean, nor is a space used between two-word personal names in Korean. Therefore, the two-word personal names in this paper are not hyphenated or spaced, as in Ch'ongkwang and Yonghwan.

Also, although I hardly see any Chinese characters in the Hoesaek komusin, I provide both Korean and Chinese characters for the names of people, monasteries, and hermitages. The book gives Myoom's birth year as 1931, as is indicated in her official birth certificate. During the interview, however, Myoom informed me that she was actually born in 1932. When asked about the discrepancy, she explained that her birth certificate got lost at her hometown, Chinju, during the Korean War (1950-53). After the Korean War, her brother-in-law registered her birth year as 1931.

3. Korean Buddhists generally acknowledge that Myoom and Myongsong are the most influential educators for contemporary nuns. Myongsong is President of Unmunsa (Cloud Gate Monastery) Buddhist Institute for Nuns in Kyongsang Bukdo Province and resides with two hundred eighty student nuns. She gives special lectures to nuns and

4. When Ch’ongdam joined monastic life, he received Sunho as his Dharma name (pohmyong), but he later took on a new Dharma name, Ch’ongdam. He was the first Temporal Head (ch’ongmu wonjang) of the Korean Chogye Order (Chogyechong) and the leader of Chonghwa Undong (1954–62), a purification movement of the Korean Buddhist Saṅgha in the 1950s. He was the Second Patriarch of the Chogy Order. For more information on Ch’ongdam and Chonghwa Undong, see Robert E. Buswell, Jr., The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 30–6; Yun Ch’ongkwang, Kousyogolchon 24 Ch’ongdam k’unsumin: Maum e t’anun pul muot uro kkuryonun’go (A Series of Biographies of Eminent Monks 24, Master Ch’ongdam: How Can You Extinguish the Flame of Your Mind?) (Seoul: Urih’ulp’ansa, 2002); Chogyechongsa: Kunbyondaep’yon (History of the Chogye Order: Premodern and Present) (Seoul: Taehan pulgyo Chogyechong kylukwon, 2001), pp. 105, 132, 175–7, 180, 185, 198, 203–5, 220 227–9, 235, 240, 246, 252, 296–9, 235–6, 252, 296–7.


7. Myoom recalls that when she arrived at Yunp’il’am there were about 20 nuns. She also adds that Yunp’il’am was one of the few hermitages for nuns in Korea to practice meditation at the time. When I asked her what Yunp’il’am means, she said that she was not sure. Yet, she has heard that it was probably named after Yunp’il, a layman who built the hermitage.

8. According to Ilt’a (1929–1999), a Korean Vinaya master, the Chinese Samini yurui was compiled in China at the end of the Ch’ing Dynasty (1644–1912). Ilt’a translated the Chinese Samini yuru into Korean in 1992, comp. and tr., Samini yurui (Precepts and Decorum for Śrāmarerikās (Seoul: Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong kylukwon, 1992), pp. 6, 21–2. Myoom told me that she learned the proceedings of the bhiksuni ordination from Ilt’a when she was appointed as an ordination catechist in 1982. For more information on Ilt’a, see Buswell, Jr., The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea, pp. 84, 90, 109.

9. For more information on Cha’un, see Buswell, Jr., The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea, p. 90; Chogyechongsa: Kunbyondaep’yon, pp. 177, 198, 214, 236, 240, 278.


11. It is said that the Fan-wang Ching was translated into Chinese by Kumrajiva in 406 CE. It is to be found in the Taishō-shinshū-daizōkyō, comp. Takakusu Junjiro and Kaigyoku Watanabe (Tokyō: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-


13. Ibid., p. 236.


15. For more information on Unho’s life and works, see Shin Yongch’ol, ed. *Unho sunim ui kusin patchach* (Great Footsteps of Master Unho) (Seoul: Dongguk yokyongwon, 2002); Yun Chongkwang, *Kosungyolchon 19 Unho k’unsunim: Yongwonhan nge kosiran amugot ooptane* (A Series of Biographies of Eminent Monks 19, Master Unho: There Is Nothing Permanently Mine) (Seoul: Urich’ulp’ansa, 2002); and Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyobak nonmunjip (Some Memories of the Elderly Master Unho).”

16. When a Korean monk or nun specializes in the Chinese Buddhist scriptures, he or she is called as a kangsa.

17. Ch’ongdam and Unho studied Buddhist scriptures together between 1928 and 1930 at the Buddhist monastic seminary at Kaun-sa (Opening Cloud Monastery) in Seoul (*Chogyechongsa: Kunhyondaep’yon*, pp. 105-7). Myoom told me that Unho was the best male master whom Ch’ongdam could ask to be in charge of his daughter’s education.

18. Yi, *Hoesaek komusin*, pp. 239-40. Worun, Unho’s eldest disciple, states that, in August 1952, Unho told Worun: “So far there have been a couple of places where [a few] nuns have gathered to study [the Buddhist texts under the male teachers], but there have been some problems because of the [male] kangsa. If a young [male] kangsa teaches [monks and nuns] with a full of energy, there is always ch’abom [scandal or gossip]. If an elderly [male] kangsa teaches [monks and nuns], then there is no ch’abom. Yet, the elderly kangsa does not have enough energy to teach them. In these days, the numbers of nuns are increasing. We should teach them to reshape the [Korean] Saṅgha [in the future]. We need to produce nun kangsas [so that they can educate themselves]. Thus, tomorrow I will leave for P’akye-sa (Holding Stream Monastery) to ask Songch’ol Sunim and other influential masters if I could teach the Buddhist texts to nuns.” Worun, “Myongsong sunim kobui kinyom pulgyobak nonmunjip,” *Myongsong sunim kobui kinyom pulgyobak nonmunjip* (A Collection of Essays in Buddhist Studies: A Festschrift for Venerable Myongsong in Honor of Her 70th Birthday), ed. Myongsong sunim kobui kinyom nonmunjip kanhaengwiwonhoe (Seoul: Pulkwang ch’ulp’anbu, 2000), pp. 549-50.

Unho asked the leading Korean monks, Songch’ol, Hyobong (1888-1966), Kusan (1909-83) Ch’ongdam, Hyanggok (1912-78), Hongkyong, and Ch’aun, if he could teach the Buddhist texts to nuns. All of them delightedly agreed with Unho to educate the nuns. Because Unho knew that educating nuns was a sensitive issue for Korean monks at that time, he wanted to first get the agreement of the monk masters on the issue of the nuns’ education. He also held a vision of better future for the nuns and believed that education was the key. During his tour for asking the masters about nuns’ education, Unho met Song Tokyun, a married monk and abbot of Tonghak-sa on the road. Song invited Unho to teach at Tonghak-sa. On November 14, 1952, Unho began to teach Buddhist texts to the monks and nuns at Tonghak-sa. Ibid., pp. 549-51.

19. Hyegwan was a widow who had a successful business before she became a nun. Yi, *Hoesaek komusin*, pp. 235-36.

20. According to Myoom, Myoyong was Hyegwan’s only daughter. Both mother and daughter had become nuns. Ibid.


22. Yi, *Hoesaek komusin*, p. 239.

23. Ibid., p. 240.
24. Ibid., p. 241. Myoom does not provide any specific information as to why Unho first taught the Mencius and the Analects of Confucius in either the Hoesaek komusin or Kim’s manuscript. It is, however, worth pointing out that Myoom’s monk masters, Songch’ol, Ch’ongdam, Cha’un, Unho, and Kyongbong, all completed their education at the Korean traditional Confucian Academy before they became monks. After entering monastic life, they took a couple of years to master the Chinese Buddhist scriptures, as they were already educated in literary Chinese in the academic setting.


26. For more information on the Ch’imun, see Buswell, The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea, pp. 96, 101. For more information on the curriculum of the Buddhist Institute, see pp. 95-99.

27. For more information on sodang, see Hildi Kang, pp. 37-39; Buswell, The Zen Monastic Experience, p. 99.


29. Ibid., p. 242.

30. For more information on the Sojang, see Buswell, The Zen Monastic Experience, p. 96.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Yi, Hoesaek komusin, pp. 242-5. For the English translation of the Choryo, see Buswell, The Korean Approach Zen: The collected Works of Chinul, pp. 262-374. Myoom took less than a year at Tonghak-sa to complete the Ch’imun and the four texts of the Fourfold Collection. It seems that her class ran so fast. When I studied the Buddhist texts between 1970-1975 at Unmun-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns, I took two years to finish the Ch’imun and the Fourfold Collection Course. Myoom must have studied extremely hard to keep up with her classes.

34. According to Worun, Unho left Tonghak-sa after his fallout with the abbot of Tonghak-sa, Song Tokyun. Song was one of the powerful married monks who had gained ascendancy since the Japanese colonial period. Song tried to appropriate Tonghak-sa as his personal property and pushed Unho to concede. Unho refused and left Tonghak-sa without endorsing to take over Tonghak-sa as Song’s personal property. Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyobak nonmunjip,” p. 551.

35. Myoom does not tell us which Buddhist text she studied for a month at Kumsu-sa in either the Hoesaek komusin or Kim’s manuscript.


37. According to Worun, Ch’aun and Hongkyong had invited Unho to teach Buddhist texts at T’ongdo-sa where a married monk was an abbot (Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyobak nonmunjip,” p. 548). There were about twenty monk students at T’ongdo-sa at the time (Yi, Hoesaek komusin, pp. 248-49). Myoom in Kim’s manuscript tells that, during the Japanese colonial period, the celibate monks and the married monks lived together at the major monasteries. The celibate monks were called ip’angsung (monk scrutinizer of principle), whereas the married monks were called sap’angsung (lit., monk scrutinizer of phenomena). The ip’angsung were solely devoted to practicing meditation, but the sap’angsung were in charge of running the monastery, occupied with all of the official jobs at the monasteries, and controlled the monastic finances. The celibate monks at the monasteries had an extremely frugal lifestyle. The different roles of the ip’angsung and sap’angsung originated during the Choson period. For more information on the ip’angsung and sap’angsung, see Kim Yong’tae, Hanguk pulgyosa gaesol (An Introduction of the History of Korean Buddhism) (Seoul: Kyongsowon, 1990), pp. 220-22.

38. The Nung’om-kyong is the abbreviation of the Shu Nengom-kyong (Ch. Shou-leng-yen ching). For more information on the Nung’om-kyong, see Buswell, The Zen Monastic Experience, pp. 97-99.

40. Ibid., p. 247.

41. In Kim’s manuscript, Myoom says that a nun, Pokyong, also collected pieces of candles and sent them to her.

42. Yi, Hoesaek komusin, pp. 246–47.

43. Myoom does not provide further information on how the rest of the nuns at Pot’a-am managed to live in either the Hoesaek komusin or Kim’s manuscript. Yet, she told me that the majority of the nuns at that time usually engaged in begging for alms.


45. In Kim’s manuscript Myoom says that Myongsong studied the Buddhist texts under her monk father, Kwanung (1910-2004), one of the contemporary great masters in Korea, before she joined Myoom’s class at Tongdo-sa. Myoom studied the Nung’om-kyong with Myongsong and shared a room lived with Myongsong. Myongsong became one of the two leading educators for contemporary nuns in Korea. Worun agrees with Myoom that Myoom studied the Nung’om-kyong and the Taeung kisinnon under Unho, between 1953 and 1955. Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip,” pp. 551–52. For more information on Myongsong, see my footnote 3 in this paper. For more information on Kwanung, see Chogyechongsa: Kunhyondaep’yon, pp. 211, 240, 251, 281.

46. Worun testifies that Unho was determined to educate Myoom, Myongsong, and Myoyong as teachers. While monks usually had their classes in the morning, the three nuns had their classes in the afternoon. Unho always overworked. No matter how many questions he had to answer, he never showed his exhaustion to answer questions for monks and nuns. Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip,” pp. 551–52.

47. According to Worun, in early 1955 the chonghwa undong of the Korean Buddhist sangba spread throughout Korea. The abbot and the official staff of Tongdo-sa were married monks. Unho’s celibate monk students actively supported the chonghwa undong. He felt that he was in a hot seat between his students and the married monks. Unho could not teach his students in peace and left Tongdo-sa. Unho moved to Yonhwa-sa where there was no dispute between the celibate and married monks. Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip,” p. 548.

48. In Kim’s manuscript Myoom narrates that her life at Tosol-am in Chinju was the happiest time of her study because she did not have to worry about food and begging for alms, for the abbess of Tosol-am offered Myoom and other nuns three meals a day. Myoom was often invited to have meals with her mother and older sister in Chinju.


50. Yi, Hoesaek komusin, pp. 257–58. Myoyong gave up her study on Buddhist texts after finishing the Taeung kisinnon. She told Myoom that she was not able to study Buddhist scriptures. She wanted to devote herself to the practice of meditation. She soon died from a car accident at the age of 25 (Yi, Hoesaek komusin, pp. 256–57). In Kim’s manuscript Myoom says that Myoyong studied the Taeung kisinnon with her at Yonhwa-sa. Worun agreed with Myoom that Myoyong studied the Taeung kisinnon under Unho at Yonhwa-sa. Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip,” pp. 551–52.

51. Worun says that Myongsong went to Tonghak-sa to continue her study on Buddhist scriptures under the monk master, Kyongbong (1885-1969). Only Myoom followed Unho to Haein-sa (Worun, “Myongsong sunim kohui kinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip,” p. 552). I suspect that in 1955 Kyongbong and the abbess at Tonghak-sa were already preparing to open a Buddhist Institute for nuns. In February of 1956 Tonghak-sa was established as the first Buddhist Institute for Nuns in Korea (http:www.donghaksao.or.kr/02/menu.htm). I will discuss Kyongbong in detail later in this paper. For more information on Haein-sa, see the website (http://www.haein-sa.org/haein.php3).

52. According to Peter N. Gregory, the Diamond Sūtra is a short Perfection of Wisdom scripture noted for its bold paradoxes. It became extremely popular within Ch’an tradition because of its association with the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng (Peter N. Gregory, tr., Inquority into the Origin of Humanity: An Annotated Translation of Tsung-mi’s Yuan jen lun with a Modern Commentary (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, p. 212). For the English translations of the
53. For more information on the *Perfect Enlightenment Sūtra*, see Gregory (p. 221); Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*, p. 97.


55. Luis O. Gómez states that there are no references to the *Hwaom-kyong* as a corpus in Indian scholastic or exegetical literature. Gómez speculates that the final compilation of the *sūtra* took place in Central Asia where the work was already known by the middle of fourth century. There are three completed versions of the entire collection of the text. The first comprehensive translation of the *Hwaom-kyong* in 60 Scrolls into Chinese was made by Buddhabhadra and his staff from 418 to 420 C. E. A further comprehensive Chinese translation in 80 Scrolls was made by Śikṣānanda and his team between 695 and 699. The Tibetan translation of 45 chapters is a similar version of the Chinese translation in 80 Scrolls (Luis O. Gómez, “The *Avatasaka-Sūtra*,” in *Buddhism Spirituality: Indian, Southeast Asian, Tibetan, and Early Chinese* ed. Takeuchi Yoshinori (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), p. 87. For the English translation of the first half part of *Hwaom-kyong*, see Thomas Cleary, tr. *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sūtra* (Boston & London: Shambhala, 1993).


58. Myoom does not tell us which *sūtra* she translated in front of Kyongbong. I assume that she might have been asked to translate the *Wonkag-kyong*, because she had completed her study of the last Buddhist text, the *Wonkag-kyong*, in the *Sagyo-kwa*, under Unho.


60. Ibid., p. 278.

61. Ibid., p. 279.

62. Ibid., p. 282.

63. Ibid., p. 282. Myoom told me that she was ordained as a *bhikṣunī* under Ch’aun at T’ongdo-sa along with several nuns.

64. For more information on the Unmun-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns, see the website (http://www.unmunsa.or.kr).


66. For more information on the Pongnyong-sa Buddhist Institute for Nuns, see the website (http://www.bongnyongsa.or.kr/hak/01.htm).

Pomunjong and Hanmaûm Sônwôn: New Monastic Paths in Contemporary Korea

Hyangsoon Yi

Pomunjong (the Korean Buddhist Pomun Order) and Hanmaûm Sônwôn (the Hanmaûm Sôn Center) are relatively new monastic organizations that were founded by visionary bhikṣuni leaders in the latter half of the 20th century. These two communities are distinctly different in their historical backgrounds, internal organizations, and disciplinary orientations. However, the two communities are similar in that their founders introduced innovative measures to traditional Korean monasticism as a means to secure autonomous space for nuns in their practice, mission, and service. These pioneering endeavors deserve attention not only as important landmarks in the history of Korean Buddhist women but also as signs of change in the larger Buddhist communities of Korea today.

This article examines three aspects of Pomunjong and Hanmaûm Sônwôn: the historical contexts of their emergence, key figures in the two communities, and major characteristics of the training and practice of their members. While the main purpose of this paper is to present these organizations as two salient cases of Buddhist women’s self-empowerment, my discussion also aims to shed light on cooperative relations between the mainstream Buddhist establishment and these newly formed communities of nuns, both in education and in ordination.

Pomunjong is an independent bhikṣuni order founded in 1972 by Ûnyông Sûnim (1910-1981) and her teacher Kûngt’an Sûnim (1885-1980). The appearance of this unique community—presumably the only independent order of Buddhist nuns in the world—epitomizes the aspirations and struggles of Korean Buddhist women to gain uninterrupted devotion to practice. Although Pomunjong has a relatively short history, its members’ sense of unity as an exclusive female community goes all the way back to 1115, the tenth year of King Yejong’s reign in Koryô, when their main temple Pomunsa was built by National Master Tamjin. Since its establishment, this monastery is believed to have served generations of nuns as their spiritual center under successive bhikṣuni headship. This tradition lasted throughout the Chosôn dynasty when Buddhism was severely oppressed by the pro-Confucian court. Pomunsa’s survival in this hostile political milieu was possible largely because of the patronage of the female members of the royal family.

According to the “Statement on the Frame Raising” discovered in the roof of Pomunsa’s main Dharma hall, the temple underwent major renovations five times during the Chosôn period. The statement reveals the names of six abbesses in charge of these tasks: Myoch’ôm, Poch’an, Yubong, Chông’un, Yôngjông, and Kûmhun. Pomunsa thus stands as a prime example of the vital contributions of Buddhist women in keeping the Dharma alive throughout the dark ages of Buddhism in Korean history. The hardships of Pomunsa nuns, however, did not stop with the end of the Chosôn dynasty; disputes over their temple property later erupted during the Japanese occupation.

When Kûngt’an Sûnim joined Pomunsa’s long line of abbesses in 1912, the nunnery had already fallen into disarray, both physically and financially. While this was due to hundreds of years of official persecution
of Buddhism, the situation became worse under the colonial government, which forced the foreign institutions of Japanese Buddhism on Korea. Amid the increasingly harsh colonial exploitation of all sectors of Korean society and the concomitant disintegration of the traditional monastic structure, Kûngt’an Sûnim and Ûnyông Sûnim deeply realized that nuns’ continued practice would be seriously jeopardized without a minimum level of financial self-sufficiency. The two leaders, therefore, resolved to resuscitate their temple economy first, embarking on three years of begging rounds. Ûnyông Sûnim even briefly tried her hand at the restaurant business, while K’ungt’an Sûnim was residing in Kûmgang Mountain for meditation.

The modern regeneration of Pomunsa is thus credited to these two brave bhikṣuṇīs; the birth of Pomunjong, especially, cannot be separated from the story of Ûnyông Sûnim. As a young nun, Ûnyông Sûnim single-handedly defended the nunnery from the most powerful monk in colonial Korea, who attempted to seize the temple for his private use by wielding his influence as an adopted son of the Japanese Governor General. His and his collaborators’ financial scheme embroiled Ûnyông Sûnim in a series of lawsuits – unprecedented incidents in the Korean Buddhist community.5 Ûnyông Sûnim ultimately won the legal battle, but the Pomunsa nuns found themselves caught up in another conflict years later: the confrontation between traditional celibate monks and the Japanese-style married clergy during the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism in the post-liberation years.

As a solution to the dilemma of this schism, and more urgently, as a long-term measure to ensure their political neutrality and financial independence, the Pomunsa nuns declared the establishment of a separate order by elevating Pomunsa (Pomun Temple) to Pomunjong (Pomun Order). Kûngt’an Sûnim and Ûnyông Sûnim were appointed as the order’s supreme matriarch and general secretary, respectively, and the Lotus Sūtra was chosen as the order’s main text. The nuns also laid out their lineage by designating Mahaprajati of ancient India as their Dharma ancestor and by identifying Ching-chien of early China and Pôpyu of the Silla Kingdom as two nodal figures in the Dharma transmission of the order.6

Among the many remarkable achievements of Ûnyông Sûnim and Kûngt’an Sûnim, the most pioneering was probably the introduction of a monastic educational program for nuns. Especially keen on this project was Ûnyông Sûnim, then a 27-year-old bhikṣuṇi, who regretted the unfortunate early curtailing of her own monastic education.7 The Pomun Kangwôn (monastic seminary) was thus opened in 1936 as the first of its kind established in Korea for the systematic training of nuns in Buddhist doctrine. The instructors included highly respected figures of that time: the Bhikṣu Yôngmyông and Suok; Bhikṣus An Chinho and An Tôkam; and lay intellectuals, such as Yi Chong’ik, Yi Sôp, Kim T’aehûp, Hong Yôngjin, and Hwang Yôngjin.8

The monastic training and discipline in Pomunjong were not limited to doctrinal study. Along with sūtras, the nuns were taught Buddhist ritual music and dance, called pômp’ae.” The monks who were the masters of these sacred arts were invited to pass down their knowledge and skills to the Pomunjong nuns.9 This is how the order gained the popular reputation of “a place of ritual-service nuns.”10 From today’s vantage point, it was farsighted of Ûnyông Sûnim to encourage her disciples to learn these arts. Until recently, ritual performances, especially those dedicated to one’s well-being after death were viewed somewhat disapprovingly as a manifestation of blind devotional Buddhism.11 Interestingly, such a negative perception was often linked with female Buddhist practice. Therefore, conservative Sôn monks and nuns tend to disregard ritual music and dance as outside the proper realm of monastic education and practice. Lately, however, the artistic merits and social functions of the ancient Buddhist rituals have begun to be reevaluated in Korea, and accordingly, highly talented ritual performers have attracted attention from the general public as the preservers of the nation’s intangible cultural heritage.12 Given this change in perception, it can be said retrospectively that Ûnyông Sûnim’s educational vision was broad-based and even had a progressive element.

Lastly, Pomunjong’s dedication to social service work should be noted for its far-reaching impact on redefining the role of contemporary Buddhism. The nuns’ welfare program for children and the elderly from
less privileged classes and especially their care of orphaned girls set an excellent model for other Buddhist organizations. Pomunjong began to offer Dharma talks for children in 1952 and built a nursing home called Shijawôn in 1971. The kindergartens are still operating successfully. These endeavors preceded the implementation of a modern welfare system in the larger Korean society, a society in which social work had long been associated with Christian charity organizations from overseas. Therefore, Pomunjong's grassroots work for the poor and marginalized in the rapidly industrialized society can be seen as a fine example of engaged Buddhism.

As of 1999, Pomunjong included approximately 250 nuns and 80,000 lay followers, in 37 monasteries. For the education and ordination of its monastic members, Pomunjong collaborates with Chogyejong, the largest order in Korean Buddhism, relying on the latter's facilities and procedures. After the closure of their own kangwôn in 1986, Pomunjong nuns have participated in the monastic seminaries and ordination ceremonies conducted by Chogyejong. Pomunjong owns its own Sônwôn (meditation monastery), but many of their members also join the summer and winter retreats administered by Chogyejong.

Pomunjong's reliance on Chogyejong for crucial matters such as education and ordination are bound to raise uneasy questions concerning the current status and future prospects of the independence of this bhikṣūṇī order. My recent interviews with several members of Pomunjong, however, have quelled many of these concerns. Cautiously but clearly, they expressed their deep respect for the founding ideals of the order and their resolution to continue their Dharma work in their characteristically low-keyed manner. The emergence of this unique female order was due to a host of historical factors. Furthermore, the members of this order are fully aware of the changing circumstances which have directly and indirectly affected their identity, and they are prepared to handle challenges to their historical continuity. In the meantime, their main concern does not lie so much in holding on to their institutional image for outsiders, as in addressing the real needs of lay devotees in the increasingly diversified Buddhist population of contemporary Korea.

The year 1972 saw not only the birth of Pomunjong, but also the establishment of Hanmaûm Sônwôn by Daehaeng Sûnim (1926-). Ten years after it was founded in the city of Anyang, Hanmaûm Sônwôn was officially registered in Chogyejong, thereby enabling its Saîgha members to benefit fully from the mainstream monastic education system. The impressive growth of Hanmaûm Sônwôn for the past three decades can be measured, in part, by its 25 domestic and overseas branches, roughly 200 fully ordained disciples of Daehaeng Sûnim, and more than 20,000 lay affiliates. This energetic new community of Buddhists has focused on urban mission work, suggesting a fresh direction for the reclusive “mountain” monasticism that has long dominated Korean Buddhism.

In many respects, the reputation of Hanmaûm Sônwôn stems from Daehaeng Sûnim, the soft-spoken but charismatic spiritual leader of the community who is a highly revered Sôn master. Before she settled in Hanmaûm Sônwôn in 1972, Daehaeng Sûnim had undergone an extraordinary course of practice in the mountains for nearly ten years. The temple in Anyang, therefore, can be said to embody her spirit of parivarta (hoehyang in Korean) as the manifestation of her long and arduous spiritual pursuit. She came down to the city, she states, in order to help ordinary people develop the inexhaustible powers of their minds so that they can cure their own spiritual and physical diseases rather than relying on 'miracle workers' to solve each problem confronting them.

Nature played an essential role in Daehaeng Sûnim’s advancement as a Sôn practitioner. According to her brief biography in Hanmaûm yojôn (Fundamentals of One Mind), she was forced into an outdoor life from quite an early age due to the sudden collapse of her family’s fortune. Growing up in utter poverty, the tenderhearted child spent countless days and nights in the forest around her family shack. In unfathomable solitude, the precocious young girl befriended all forms of sentient beings there and pondered the mysteries of their constantly shifting existential conditions. This wide exposure to the natural world led to the opening of her mind’s eye to the interdependence of the entire universe as one compassionate community. In later years, her intense practice in the mountains gave rise to various anecdotes about the seemingly miraculous
help she received from or gave to wild animals. In the biography, these beasts and indeed, all forms of sentient beings she encountered in her secluded practice are portrayed as invaluable “teachers” in her spiritual training.18

Daehaeng Sûnim’s solitary wandering in the wilderness diverges significantly from the established educational paths followed by the majority of monastics. Even the most resolute monks and nuns rarely adopt such an extreme practice of itinerant walking meditation for so long. Despite her lack of formal schooling in both secular and religious settings, she was nevertheless a favored student of the renowned Sôn master, Hanam Sûnim, who clearly discerned her great potential at an early stage. Daehaeng Sûnim was ordained as a śrāmaṇerikā in 1950 by Hanam Sûnim and as a bhikṣuṇī in 1961, with Ujin Sûnim and T’anhô Sûnim as her teacher and preceptor, respectively.19 As a practitioner, Daehaeng Sûnim was less concerned with institutional recognition or official titles than with a thorough understanding of her “true self.” She reminisces that enlightenment was not a goal she consciously set:

I never intended to become a Buddha or to achieve enlightenment. Because I was born into this world, I just wanted to know who I am and what I am. After realizing that my physical body is not me, my consciousness is not me, and my will is not me, I just wanted to know who is my true self and what is my true self after all those other things are gone.20

In some ways, this tendency resonates with the legends of eccentric and awakened Sôn monks and nuns. The dramatic stories of Daehaeng Sûnim’s nomadic practice provide a touch of immediacy and humanity to her teachings, making her Dharma talks moving and appealing on a personal level.

One way of approaching Daehaeng Sûnim’s teachings is by means of the key terms recurring in her recorded Dharma talks. First of all, the concept of hanmaûm constitutes the core of Daehaeng Sûnim’s work. The term is defined as follows:

“Han” means one, great, and combined, while “maûm” means mind, as well as heart, and also means the universal consciousness that is the same in every thing and every place. Thus “hanmaûm” means the one, great, combined mind, the inter-connectedness of everything, and the wholeness that includes everything.21

Hanmaûm as “the universal consciousness” accords with the doctrine of pratitya-samutpada (yôn’gi in Korean) in that both inculcate the idea of singularity in multiplicity (or particularity in universality) and vice versa. The doctrine of non-duality in Buddhism is succinctly summarized in her statement: “All minds and my mind are not two.”22 Her teaching revolves around the importance of the direct realization of hanmaûm as the ultimate and limitless source of cosmic energy.

Closely related to the concept of hanmaûm is that of juingong, which refers to “the owner, the doer that is empty, that is without any fixed shape, and which always changes and manifests.”23 By definition, juingong has an affinity with “Buddha nature,” a central concept of the Mahāyāna ideology.24 In explaining the notion of juingong, Daehaeng Sûnim highlights its positive aspects as a dynamic agent rather than its static and passive image as an “empty” entity. Juingong, our true self, is pertinent to Sôn. Daehaeng Sûnim stresses that Sôn is not a special meditational activity but is everything we do in our day-to-day lives, and that Sôn practice should be aimed at the cessation of desire and the investigation of mind. In “letting things go,” we should firmly believe that juingong will take care of all our life’s matters, both good and bad. Sôn is, then, “entrusting everything to juingong” unconditionally.25

Daehaeng Sûnim’s appeal to a broad range of audience can be examined in terms of her stylistic traits. Above all, her language is simple and lucid. She prefers vernacular expressions to abstruse jargon. One good example is hanmaûm, a native Korean phrase, which is synonymous with but semantically richer than
ilsim, the Chinese word for “one mind.” Juingong is another common term which Daehaeng Sûnim chose as an accessible vehicle for a profound metaphysical idea. This term appeared in Buddhist writings prior to Daehaeng Sûnim’s work, but it gained a deeper philosophical dimension through her systematic articulation of its meaning. Her figures of speech are often derived from mundane items, such as electricity, computers, and food. Her rhetoric proves that the living language of everyday life can serve as a powerful medium for complex religious messages. As is illustrated by her own Sôn poems and Dharma songs, the vernacular has not just pragmatic but aesthetic value as well. In Korea, Buddhist verse is conventionally composed in literary Chinese. However, Daehaeng Sûnim employs the Korean vernacular in intense creative moments. It seems to be this spirit of promoting accessibility to the Dharma that has compelled her to translate enigmatic Sanskrit dhāraṇīs into simple yet graceful Korean.26

Aside from being a sign of a compassionate and skillful teacher, Daehaeng Sûnim’s colloquial style has significant socio-cultural implications in the context of Korea’s dual linguistic legacy. In pre-modern Korean writing, the Chinese language signified erudition, law, and authority, and it was monopolized by elite men of the nobility, whereas vernacular Korean was popular among women and commoners. In the modern period, Korean has supplanted Chinese in most modes of writing, but in Buddhist discourse Chinese remains the authoritative script. Only recently has the heavy use of “incomprehensible” archaic Chinese in Buddhist texts and rituals elicited criticism for its negative impact on missionary work.27 Seen in this light, Daehaeng Sûnim’s vernacularism demonstrates her egalitarian and innovative attitude. On the one hand, it is consistent with Sôn Buddhism’s view that language is a means, not an end. On the other hand, her ability to transform ordinary words into highly-loaded religious terms reminds us that language is an important tool for modernizing Buddhism and thereby democratizing society in general.

In training her disciples, Daehaeng Sûnim puts more weight on direct experience than on doctrinal knowledge. To novices who have just entered the monastic life, she gives the general advice to stay away from the influence of books for a while and instead, concentrate on watching the nature of mind.28 This approach conforms to Sôn Buddhism’s priority of mind cultivation over sūtra study. For instance, the title page of Hanmaûm yojôn quotes her statement: “If we cling to language, we will never know the true taste of our soup even though we master this book by heart.” Daehaeng Sûnim emphasizes that we should embrace obstacles as positive opportunities for “experimenting” with our minds.29 She prescribes no formula for practitioners other than learning from first-hand experience. One of the nuns at Hanmaûm Sônwôn commented that Daehaeng Sûnim’s unimposing liberal guidance has ironically kept her disciples more heightened in their practice than they would have been under a rigorously structured tutelage.30

Although Daehaeng Sûnim’s teachings focus on mind, she does not disregard the merits of formal seminary education. This is evident in that many of her students attend kangwôn. A letter Daehaeng Sûnim sent to the abbess of Unmunsa Kangwôn provides us with a rare insight into the deep respect she holds for the training at the seminary:

Now, how many rounds you have to make in this late night without a trace of doing them, while your fishing rod is thrown into the deep water to wake up the fish sleeping among reeds!… Sûnim, as a parent who has sent a child under your wing, I do not know how to express my utmost gratitude. Please make her a good one.31

For those who can handle scripture without falling into the pitfall of language, Daehaeng Sûnim recommends the Heart Sûtra, the Diamond Sûtra, the Lotus Sûtra, and the Flower Ornament Sûtra.32 In line with many Sôn masters, however, she compares the scriptures to a raft a practitioner should discard once it has helped him or her cross the river.33

Pomunjong and Hanmaûm Sônwôn showcase the powerful, yet understated, capacity of Buddhist women in Korea. The two organizations have enhanced the status of nuns by broadening the range of roles
they can play in contemporary society as Sŏn practitioners, Dharma teachers, social workers, and ritual performers. Their common efforts for urban mission work coincide with the growing need for meditation centers and prayer sites among city dwellers. These and other changes they have brought to traditional monasticism are indicative of female monastics’ fierce spirit of self-reinvention in these changing times. In assessing the accomplishments of these two communities, however, we should not lose sight of the support they have received from existing Buddhist institutions, most notably from the Chogye Order. The sharing of educational opportunities between the nuns of Pomunjong and Chogyejong is an especially noteworthy case of harmonious inter-denominational partnership. This type of open-minded collaboration among different sectors, genders, and monastic ranks can offer a valuable lesson for the larger Korean society at this critical moment of transition toward a more democratic nation.

NOTES

1. In this article, the modified McCune-Reischauer system is used for the romanization of Korean words, except for cases where other conventions are already established. Korean names are written in the order of surname and personal name, according to the Korean convention.

2. Poam taesa Song Ûnyông Sûnim iltaegi [A biography of Great Master Poam, Bhikṣuī Song Ûnyông] (Seoul: Tachan Pulgyo Pomunjong Ûnyông Sûnim mundohoe iltong [Disciples of Bhikṣuī Ûnyông of the Korean Buddhist Pomun Order], 1984), pp. 145-46 (PTSU hereafter). In this book, An Tŏkam surmises that the temple was likely to have been built by nuns, but their teacher Tamjin came to be associated with it. This view was based on his speculation that the temple has been used as a convent since its foundation. According to Kim Ùngch’ôl, however, no decisive written records are available to prove that Pomunsa was used as a nunnery during the Koryŏ period. Nevertheless, most scholars agree that it was occupied by nuns during the Chosŏn dynasty. See Kim’s article, “Chông’ôpwôn kwa sasūngbang ṭi yŏksa ro pon Han’guk ṭi piguni sŭngha (The Korean Bhikṣuī Sangha from the perspective of the history of the Cleansing Karma Temple and the four Buddhist monasteries),” Chŏnt’ong kwa Hyŏndae (Tradition and Contemporary Times), 7 (Spring 1999), p. 81.

3. Pomunsa was one of the four temples permitted to remain open when King Sŏngjong’s anti-Buddhist policies mandated the closure of all 26 nunneries in and around the capital in 1475. The other three temples were: Ch’ôngryongsa, Ch’ôngryangsa, and Mit’asa. See Kim Ùngch’ôl, p. 80.

4. PTSU, p. 145.

5. Accounts of these lawsuits are available in PTSU (pp. 164-192) and also in Samu Sûnim’s article, “Eunyeong Sunim and the Founding of Pomun-jong, the First Independent Bhikṣuī Order,” Spring Wind: Buddhist Cultural Forum, 6 (1986), pp. 129-62.

6. PTSU, p. 315.

7. According to An’s short biography of Ûnyông Sûnim, she barely had time to finish Cho’balsim chagyông-mun (Admonitions to Beginners) under Kûngt’an Sûnim’s tutelage. See PTSU, p. 156.


9. PTSU, p. 198. Many of these monks belonged to the T’aego Order, which consisted largely of married monks.
10. It is said that Kûngt'an Sûnim was quite knowledgeable in the Buddhist rituals, and Ünyông Sûnim was famous for her Dharma talks, which involved traditional Korean songs called “hach'ông.” See Ha Ch’unsang, Khaedarûm iikkottûl: Kûnse Han’guk Pulgyo rûl pîmaen pigunidûl I [Flowers of Enlightenment: Great Bhikṣûnîs in Modern Korean Buddhism I] (Seoul: Yôrae, 1998), p. 271; and PTSU, p. 202.

11. The Pôppo Shinmun (Dharma Newspaper), one of the three major Buddhist newspapers in Korea, published special feature articles on this subject in the February 14, 2004 issue. Yun Ch’ôngkwang’s editorial in the March 2, 2004 issue also pointed out the increasing commercialization of these rituals in some temples.

12. Among all the traditional Buddhist rituals, “Yôngsanjae (Rite of the Spiritual Mountain)” is perhaps the best known to the general public. It was designated as Intangible National Cultural Asset No. 50 in 1973.


15. However, Pomunjong nuns are not recorded in the Panghamnok, which lists the names of participants in each retreat season at Chogyejong meditation monasteries.


17. The expressions “disease” and “cure” arise frequently in Daehaeng Sûnim’s Dharma talks. They are metaphors for all sorts of troubles and their solutions.


19. With her ordination as a śrāmanerikâ, she received the Dharma name Ch’ônggak (listening and enlightenment) from Hanam Sûnim. “Daehaeng,” meaning “great function” was given to her by Ujin Sûnim on her full ordination as a bhikṣûnî. See HY, p. 53 and p. 126.


21. IP, p. 20.


23. IP, p. 21.

24. IP, p. 21.


26. HY, pp. 784-801.

27. This issue has often been raised by concerned Buddhists. According to the Buddhist news media, Chogyejong plans to publish a comprehensive ritual book in Korean in 2004.

28. Personal interview, 8 November 2003. Also, see HY, pp. 605-608.
29. This is just one of the terms related to science and technology which Daehaeng Sûnim extensively uses in her Dharma talks.

30. For Daehaeng Sûnim’s emphasis on direct experience, see HY, pp. 601-605. The interviewee likened Daehaeng Sûnim’s teaching style to the way in which a lioness watches over her cubs keenly but unobtrusively.

31. HY, p. 162.

32. HY, p. 606.

33. HY, p. 605.
Engaged Buddhist Practice
A Silent Undercurrent: The Significance of Mae Chiis’ Socially Engaged Buddhist Practice in Thailand

Monica Lindberg Falk

In Thailand, structural gender inequality is brought into sharp relief in the realm of religion. The ordained life of men is highly respected and ordination raises their social standing. For women, ordination is not widely respected and it is not in line with Thai gender order. Thai women who aspire to become ordained usually have to struggle with various difficulties, even when they seek only mae chii ordination rather than bhikkhuni ordination.

Bhikkhuni (fully ordained nun) and mae chii (Thai Buddhist nun) are two categories of Buddhist women that exist in Thailand today and both are outside the Thai Saṅgha. The bhikkhuni order never spread to Thailand and the bhikkhuni lineage of Theravāda female monastics has only recently been introduced to Thai society. Most mae chiis receive the eight Buddhist precepts, which are: to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual activity, lying, taking intoxicants, eating after noon, avoiding beautification or entertainment and sleeping on thick mattresses. There are some mae chiis who are given the ten precepts, which are the same as the novice monks receive and include, in addition to the eight precepts, the precept of not using money. In the Theravāda texts, bhikkhunis have 311 precepts and bhikkhus have 227.

The ongoing changes in the Thai religious realm have brought female ascetics into the limelight and raised urgent questions about the lack of gender equality in Thai Buddhism. The male-dominated Thai Buddhist Saṅgha and women’s exclusion from legal religious status became issues for popular debate when the first Thai woman received bhikkhuni novice ordination in Sri Lanka in 2001. However, women are still refused full ordination as bhikkhuni in Thailand.

The Thai Buddhist nuns (mae chiis) have lived in Thailand for centuries, but are almost invisible in society. The long history of Buddhist nuns in Thailand does not mean that they have gained formal religious authority; instead, they hold a secondary standing in the temples. In Thailand the number of nunneries is small compared to the number of monks’ temples. The nuns’ ambiguous and inferior religious position, combined with their generally low level of education, has hampered them in their monastic social role.

Mae chii Amphorn is one of about 20,000 or more Buddhist nuns who live at temples and nunneries in Thailand. Before she ordained, she visited one of the free-standing nunneries that have recently been established in Thailand. To her surprise, she met nuns at the nunnery who were educated, well respected, and also taught Dhamma and gave meditation instruction. In recent decades there has been a growth of nunneries governed by nuns themselves, independently of monks’ temples. At the same time, Thai women have become increasingly interested in Buddhist monastic life. These are notable changes and indicate that women’s performance in the religious field has expanded. Nuns at the free-standing nunneries have, through their own agency and capacity, begun to actively enhance their position and improve their circumstances, which has also been beneficial for the lay community. For example, many girls and young women now
have the chance to continue their education at these nunneries. Mae chii Amphorn is one woman who has studied at a nunnery school. She now holds a university degree and teaches both secular and Buddhist subjects at a nunnery.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the significance of Thai Buddhist nuns’ social engagement and how this affects the nuns’ ordained life, their religious authority, and their relationship with the lay community. The ethnography presented in the paper is from fieldwork carried out among Thai Buddhist nuns from 1996 onwards.

**Social Engagement**

Thai Buddhist nuns and bhikkhunis share the foremost aim of Engaged Buddhism, which is to put equity into practice. Despite the fact that gender equality is one of the foremost aims of the Engaged Buddhist Movement, leading socially engaged women are seldom mentioned. However, a large number of nuns are socially engaged and have a great commitment to their work. In Thailand, one example is the prominent nun, Mae chii Sansanee Sthirasuta, who is the founder and head of Sthiradhampa Sthana a religious center and nunnery located on the outskirts of Bangkok. She runs programs for mae chiis with the objective of deepening the nuns’ understanding of Buddhist practice and to introducing them to applications of Buddhist teaching to social and rural development. Mae chii Sansanee has also begun many community service projects, including an alternative kindergarten and a rehabilitation home for sexually abused women and women with unwanted pregnancies. She teaches meditation to university students and other laypeople, trains Thai boxers in compassion and positive attitudes, and offers Sunday Dhamma activities for families in the area. Her center is a meeting place where nuns from around the country may network and discuss ways of coping with various issues that affect nuns in particular. Khun Mae Prathin Kwan-orn and Mae chii Khunying Kanitha Wichiencharoen are two more examples of outstanding mae chiis who have been actively engaged in creating and formalizing secondary and higher education for nuns through the Thai Nuns’ Institute, Dhammacarini School, and Mahapajapati Theri College.

Mae chii Khunying Kanitha Wichiencharoen was a unique mae chii and one of the most well-known socially engaged Thai Buddhist nuns. She worked in numerous projects promoting women’s rights. Before she became a Buddhist nun, she was an influential lawyer and spent most of her life fighting to protect women from discrimination and exploitation. She was highly respected for her social work and commitment to achieving equal rights for Thai women.

Mae chii Khunying Kanitha received mae chii ordination at the third Sakyadhita conference, which was held in Sri Lanka in October 1993. She was 73 years old when she ordained. She said that she had thought of becoming a mae chii since she was young. When she was a child, she studied in a Catholic convent school in Bangkok and was very impressed by the Catholic nuns. She remembered seeing the Buddhist nuns cooking and doing domestic chores in the temple, and compared them to the Catholic nuns in the convent who had access to higher education. She wanted the Buddhist nuns to have the same opportunity.

At the time of Mae chii Khunying Kanitha’s ordination, it was difficult for her to leave the Association for the Promotion of the Status of Women (APSW), of which she was the founder. The association still needed her advice and depended on her leadership in the early years of her nunhood. Therefore, Mae chii Khunying Kanitha decided to establish what she called a “nuns’ cottage” nearby and stayed there together with a few other nuns. The different enterprises that were gathered under the umbrella organization, APSW, reflected Mae chii Khunying Kanitha’s various interests and work. A range of activities were housed in the compound, which contained: a gender research institute, a guest house, an emergency home, a nursery, a day care center, a hospice for women with HIV/AIDS, a gymnasium, and the nuns’ cottage headed by Mae chii Khunying Kanitha.
Mae chii Khunying Kanitha wanted to see nuns and laywomen playing a more active role in society through social work. She worked to improve the nuns’ generally low status in society by campaigning for their legal status and education. She saw clearly that the nuns needed a good educational background in both secular and religious subjects. She concluded that higher education and engagement in social work would help improve the rights and status of women at large. For several years she worked on a law that would have given the mae chiis legal recognition as ordained persons. However, the proposed nuns’ law was rejected by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in March 2003. This means that the nuns’ legal position is still ambiguous.

Her final project was to establish a Buddhist nuns’ college. In 1999, after five years of intensive work, the first Buddhist College for women in Thailand was open. Initially the college was a pilot project under the supervision of the Faculty of Religion and Philosophy, at the monks’ university Mahamakut Rajavidyalai. The nuns named the college Mahāprajāpatī Therī, after the first Buddhist bhikkhunī.

The combination of Mae chii Khunying Kanitha’s high social position, educational background and social engagement were crucial for the realization of the college. She argued convincingly for the nuns’ need of education. She attracted generous donations from the Supreme Patriarch, Luang Por Koon Parisutho, the abbot from Wat Dhammongkol in Bangkok, Mae Chii Thai Foundation, APSW, and from many laypeople.

Most of the nuns and laywomen who study at Mahāprajāpatī Therī College come from poor farming families whose poverty prevented them from accessing higher education. Currently, the college offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Buddhism and Philosophy. The college administrators plan to increase their educational program by offering a Bachelor’s of Arts in Social Work.

All students, whether they are nuns or not, must adhere strictly to the eight Buddhist precepts mentioned above. The daily schedule follows the routine at monasteries. This means that the day starts early with morning chanting and meditation. Then some of the nuns perform an alms round in the vicinity. Other students carry out duties such as tending to the plants and working in the kitchen. Buddhist chanting and meditation ends the day at the college.

The college educates socially engaged Buddhist nuns and young laywomen; it is compulsory for all students to conduct three months of social service before they graduate. Each week during their education, several students help out teaching English, Dhamma and other subjects when there are teacher shortages in the local primary schools. On Sundays, the nuns welcome children and adults to join in various activities at the college. The college also organizes Buddhist youth camps. When finances allow, the college intends to expand its social activities to include a home for deserted elderly women, a vocational training center, a telephone counseling service, a kindergarten, and a primary school.

Ambiguity

Mae chii Amphorn, mentioned above, said she never aspired to marry and have a family of her own; instead, she wanted to live a religious life. Several of Mae chii Amphorn’s family members had experience with the ordained life. Her father had been a monk before he married and her brother had been ordained twice. Her mother had received temporary ordination once, to fulfil a vow she had made when she was ill. However, Mae chii Amphorn was not encouraged to seek ordination and her parents did not give their consent until she was 25 years old.

Generally, Thai people are ambivalent about women who abandon traditionally accepted social roles, and they do not encourage women to renounce the world. The ideal Thai woman is expected to fulfill the role of wife and mother. The somewhat negative attitude towards mae chiis, together with their ambiguous position as renunciants, has made the role of mae chiis vague and questionable. The authorities, too, treat the mae chiis in ambiguous ways. The government supports the monks with free education, free medical care, and free or reduced fares for buses and trains. Nuns do not receive such support from the government due to
their official status as laity. However, their ambiguous position becomes obvious when the same government
denies the mae chiis the right to vote in public elections, referencing their ascetic status and renunciation of
worldly matters.

Formerly, Buddhist temples held the most central position in Thai villages and monks played the roles
of educators, sponsors of co-operative work activities, personal and social counselors, and ethical mentors.5
Most mae chiis live at temples without holding any formal role. The Thai nuns’ marginal position at temples
and in society is striking. Over the centuries there has been silence about the mae chiis, their lives, and
their roles in the temples. The impression is that they have lived an obscure life without formal religious
assignments. However, Kamala Tiyavanich reports that in regional traditions there were prominent women
renunciants, although their identities and teachings do not appear in official records because they were
devoted to meditation rather than scholastic training.6

Despite the difficulties women often face in their ordained life, many nuns develop in their vocation and
there are manifold examples of women’s great spiritual capacity. Individual mae chiis earn public recognition
for their activities, most particularly for their meditation skills. The well-known meditation teachers, such
as Acaan Naeb Mahaniran8 and Acaan Ranjuan8 have not asked for mae chi ordination. Instead they
prefer to keep their lay status. Nevertheless, they shave their heads and follow the eight Buddhist precepts
mentioned above.

### Religious Authority

Being ordained implies having a particular relationship with the lay community. Those who have
renounced the world are expected to develop knowledge and wisdom through study and meditation. They
are expected to teach the laity and also to provide a refuge in times of suffering. Monks have always had
better conditions than nuns to fulfill these duties. For reasons of religious legitimacy, it is important that
the boundary between the lay and ordained realms be maintained. The involvement of Buddhist monks
and nuns in social issues has sometimes been the object of criticism and these monks and nuns may be
derided because of the lay character of social activities. The Thai Buddhist nuns’ position of simultaneously
belonging to the secular and the religious realms demands special caution when it comes to involvement in
secular matters. Social engagement may threaten their vows and thereby undermine the religious authority
of ordained persons. By extension, some fear that if the vital boundary between the lay and the religious
realms is eroded, this will degrade the religious realm.

The mae chiis’ religious agency and performance in the religious field challenge the prevailing notion that
women belong to the lay realm only. Maintaining the distinction between the lay and ordained realms also
includes the different activities the laity and the monastics are supposed to carry out. Special chores that
are closely associated with the lay realm, such as childcare, are forbidden to mae chiis. Children below the
age of seven are not allowed to stay at nunneries. Boys are commonly not allowed to stay at nunneries at all,
no matter what age they are. There is a rule stating that mae chi should not be close to any men, monks, or
novices, even if they are relatives.

The fact that mae chiis are afforded less respect is attributed to their presumed lack of knowledge of
Buddhism, lack of Buddhist training, or a failure to keep the precepts or to follow the mae chiis’ rules. There
are many examples that contradict this kind of stereotypical perception of mae chiis at temples. However, the
mae chiis’ lack of educational opportunities and guidance in Buddhist training are well-known obstacles for
Thai nuns.9 The social background of the mae chiis is also significant for their lives as religious practitioners.
Wealth and high social prestige could enhance an individual mae chiis’ position, but is not enough to ensure
acceptance as a religious person, since wealth and social status would need to be combined with religious
knowledge and practice. Thus, education and religious practice are crucial for mae chiis in their role as
ordained persons.
Nuns at nunneries ordinarily have better conditions for monastic training than mae chiis at monks’ temples. Mae chiis who live predominantly as housekeepers for the monks have little opportunity to develop an ordained identity that contrasts fully with the lay world. Nor do laypeople recognize such nuns as knowledgeable, wise religious persons whom they can turn to in times of crisis. At temples, the nuns run the risk of having their time consumed by household chores and service to the monks such that they are left with limited time for studies and Buddhist practice. Furthermore, nuns at monks’ temples are not entitled to officiate at ceremonies and are not allowed to go on alms rounds, prohibitions that further signify their unrecognized religious position.

**Autonomy**

Over the years, mae chiis have made some limited progress within formal Buddhist institutions. Nevertheless, they continue to be discriminated against in certain respects. For example, educational opportunities have not been available for Thai nuns equivalent to those for Thai monks and Buddhist educational institutions provide a far more formal and systematic education for monks than the education available to nuns. With a lack of academic training opportunities for nuns, it follows that fewer qualified teachers graduate and thus women have less access to religious education, a cycle which is self-perpetuating. Furthermore, the invisibility of nuns in society means that women lack religious role models, a problem the mae chiis try to solve by means of their daily socially engaged Buddhist work.

I have found that most mae chiis overlook the structural inequalities of religious organizations. They are in no position to oppose the Sangha and therefore they tolerate their neglected position, in the knowledge that women have the same capacity as men to reach the Buddhist final goal of enlightenment. However, the mae chiis do not passively accept their marginalized position. Silently they have begun to utilize their autonomy outside the Thai Sangha and find ways to create spaces apart from the male hierarchy. They augment their position by creating new avenues in which novel forms of religious autonomy are made possible.

Nunneries are proving to be an appropriate platform for mae chiis who strive to fulfill their potential as Buddhist nuns. At nunneries, the role of mae chiis has been broadened and become more analogous to that of the monks. The nuns become visible in the lay community and their religious performance, hard work at the nunnery, and strict monastic behavior have been recognized by the laypeople. They are achieving higher educational standards and also earning religious recognition. This has not gained them formal legitimacy, but they are granted informal authority as religious specialists. In areas where independent nunneries are situated, mae chiis are achieving increased acceptance by and support from the laity. Social engagement, impeccable conduct, religious performances, and Buddhist knowledge have proved to be requirements for achieving religious recognition.

**NOTES**

1. A pseudonym.


11. Ibid., pp. 258-59.
Historically, religious communities aggressively participated in various forms of social activities as society evolved. They included everything from charitable or relief work for the vulnerable and underprivileged, to social reform drives and civic campaigns. In fact, religion played a pivotal part in resolving problems arising from major social changes. A classic example is the various religious social welfare programs. Many societies have a well-established tradition of religion-oriented social welfare service aimed at protecting the weak and marginalized, who often constitute a social majority.

European style welfare, which was promoted based on unlimited benefits for recipients in the 1980’s, has become the subject of doubt concerning its effectiveness as a public welfare system. A sense of crisis about the European model of a welfare state prevails. Against this background, private-sector welfare programs including ones initiated by religious groups have become more systemized and specialized. As the private sector becomes more aware of their newfound responsibilities, they attach more importance to the need to mobilize private resources in order to fund welfare activities. Such awareness has given rise to the division of labor between the public and the private sectors with an ever-increasing need for involvement of the religious community.

The private sector was given a greater mandate in providing welfare services to citizens with greater access to state welfare resources. This has created a culture of welfare pluralism, under which there is the well-established division of labor between the private and public sectors.

Against this backdrop, the religious community has taken on a bigger role in social welfare. The western model of the welfare system was first introduced to Korea in the 1920s, when the nation saw a series of welfare programs put forth by different religious faiths with an aim to propagate their beliefs to the general public. Finally, the country embraced the concept of a public welfare system, under which the government is expected to provide basic care to the public. Meanwhile, the private sector, in intensified cooperation with the state, stepped in to fill the gaps in the public welfare system. This led to the foundation and development of Buddhist social welfare service in Korea.

Currently, Korean Buddhist welfare service providers must address the following challenges. First of all, they need to redefine their identity as a private welfare service provider as part of the entire picture of social welfare. Second, they need to develop creative programs that are more responsive to public welfare needs. If they successfully address these challenges, then the Korean Buddhist welfare community will be able to unleash its potential. In particular, Buddhist welfare activities, firmly rooted in the spirit of compassion (шаби), are ideal in bringing about holistic welfare services. In line with this, this article will shed light on the past, present, and future of Buddhist social welfare activities in Korea.
History and Current Status of Buddhist Social Welfare in Korea

Buddhism was first introduced to Korea in the second year into the rule of King Sosurim of the Goguryeo Kingdom (372 C.E.). After its introduction, Buddhism continually cherished a compassionate tradition of providing relief in difficult situations, such as poverty and plague outbreaks, long before Korea modernized. Buddhist welfare activities had a significant impact on people’s welfare, which can be well documented by various historical records.

The Three Kingdoms Period (57 B.C.E. – 935 C.E.). Historical references show that Hyeja Sunim² of Gourye Kingdom initiated programs aimed at reaching out to beggars and securing water supplies for the public by tapping into underground water. In Baekje, some monastics, including Uikyũm, Kwanruk, and Tojang, were engaged in providing relief services to people. During the reign of King Chinhung of Silla, Hyekong Pöpsa³ held Palkwanjaehoi to provide solace to the spirits of the war dead.

These activities have great significance in the history of welfare activities in Korea because they were aimed at promoting the well-being of their own communities and the nation. In addition, the hwarang (literally, “flower boys”), an aristocratic youth group during the Silla kingdom, conducted welfare activities based on the Five Precepts for the Secular World (Sesok Ogye) promoted by Wong’wang Pöpsa. In some sense, the hierarchy, activities, and relief activities of the hwarang are similar to today’s welfare programs.

The Goryo Dynasty (918–1392). With its adoption as a state religion, Buddhism flourished in the kingdom of Goryo. With Buddhism’s ascendance, Goryo’s Buddhist temples and monasteries grew more powerful and influential. The temples and the government embarked on various faith-based welfare initiatives.

King Sŏngjong granted clemency to prisoners, a move based on the Buddhist principle to value all forms of life. The king ordered officials to provide shelter, food, and clothes to elderly people over 80 years old. Government-sponsored welfare facilities included Jewibo (established in 936), Kujedogam (1109), Kugudpogam (1258), Jinjedogam (1398), Chongsodaebi(1057), and Hyeminguk (1112). Compassionate welfare programs implemented by individual monasteries and temples ranged from poverty relief programs at Kaeguk, Yeonbok, and Poje Temples, to free guest housing services of Potongwon.

The tradition of Buddhist social welfare activities is deeply ingrained in po, which was established during the Goryeo Period.⁴ Po were funds raised mostly from interest accrued on offerings and donations by the Buddhist faithful. The purpose of the funds was to take care of the destitute and needy. Monasteries used po to pay for various programs such as scholarship, relief service, nursing, and other public welfare initiatives. The system flourished during the Goryeo Period until it was abolished during the reign of King Sŏngjong of the Joseon Dynasty.

The Joseon Dynasty (1392–1896). Although Buddhism was persecuted and its activities suppressed throughout the Joseon dynasty, Buddhist-oriented welfare initiatives remained relatively robust. The reason was that Buddhist monasteries were commissioned to handle some areas of welfare work, such as poverty relief and nursing. During the early Joseon period, it was common that temples established welfare facilities called chinjechang that were staffed by kansaseung, monks in charge of relief programs.

The second year into King Sejong’s reign (1422), jinseso, which was established by Hungbok temple, provided food for beggars and the hungry. During the rule of King Taejong, tile makers and providers were established to create more jobs for working families. Chang Won-Shim, a well-known philanthropist during the early Joseon period, practiced compassion by building roads and providing relief from drought.

Tansŏn and Wondong of Hyeminkuk treated wounded soldiers and cared for patients suffering from infectious diseases. Chŏnwu and Ulyu established medical facilities called hanjungbo, an important conduit for the delivery of medical services for the general public at that time, and treated low-income people for 20 years.
The Modern Era. Western religions actively engaged in welfare by setting up facilities between 1900 and 1945, the year when Japanese colonial rule ended. However, similar efforts were not visible on the part of Buddhist groups. The Buddhist community did not feel the need to build homes for the elderly, since Buddhist monasteries had a long-standing tradition of providing shelter and food to senior citizens. This is also true of childcare. It was not uncommon to see two or three young children living with monks at temples. Child protection practiced by most temples was deemed much better than that provided by orphanages as far as the mental, psychological, and moral development of the child was concerned.

Characteristics of Korean Buddhist Welfare Programs

Influenced by changing religious policies and the evolving roles of monasteries, traditional Buddhist welfare programs demonstrated several characteristics. First, social welfare activities of temples were sporadic and temporary. In other words, temples and monasteries, which serve their original function as religious facilities during peacetime, became hospitals or shelters in times of need. Second, expenses incurred by relief activities involving monasteries were usually covered by offerings and donations from the wealthy. Nevertheless, they had access to the governmental or royal treasury in the case of nationwide disasters. Third, Buddhist social welfare services relied heavily on individual monasteries and monks during the Joseon dynasty. These welfare activities show that, although Buddhism was officially banned throughout the period, monastics were committed to promoting welfare and relief programs based on compassion.

For all their individual commitment, over time there was a growing need to modernize and systemize the delivery of Buddhist welfare services. Nevertheless, the Buddhist community remained relatively passive, while western religious organizations, armed with the modern concepts of international aid and social welfare, were actively expanding their reach in welfare activities in Korean between 1876 and 1910, the era when the country began to open up to the outside world. During that time, the Buddhist welfare activities somewhat dwindled as the Buddhist community struggled to put in place systems and programs that matched those of western religions.

Transformation

Today, the Korean Buddhist welfare community has found its place by actively engaging in care for the needy through welfare facilities based on Buddhist philosophies and ideologies. With its activities steadily growing in scope, ranging from childcare to care for the elderly and the handicapped, the Buddhist community is implementing a wide variety of welfare programs.

Development of Buddhist social welfare in contemporary Korean society is clearly visible. Throughout Korea’s tumultuous modern history, the Buddhist welfare community successfully reinvented itself by reducing its heavy reliance on individual monasteries and temples for welfare activities. Buddhist social welfare departments, introduced at colleges and universities, have produced a pool of educated human resources, which has helped the Buddhist welfare community keep up with trends in social welfare and expand its reach. The presence of Buddhism in Korea for 1600 years, with its legacy deeply ingrained in people’s sentiment, served as a seedbed for the subsequent growth of Buddhist social welfare services.

Quantitative Growth

For the past ten years Buddhist social welfare activities have shown remarkable growth in terms of quantity. From 1994, the Joyge Order Social Welfare Foundation started to compile nationwide data on
the total number of Buddhist welfare facilities. The surveys showed a dramatic growth in the past ten years, between 1995 and 2004. Today, more than 100 Buddhist welfare organizations, including more than 50 social welfare corporations, run more than 400 welfare facilities ranging from child and elderly daycare centers to centers for youth and the disabled, to community centers and counseling centers. It is noteworthy that the Buddhist welfare community has built its capacity to adapt itself to the changing needs of welfare recipients.

Table 1. The Number of Buddhist Social Welfare Facilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of facility</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>2004 (February)</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>642%</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>990%</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>976%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>207%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>220%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>227%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disabled</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>144%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>467%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>356%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>200%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>455%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>864%</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>845%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>175%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>200%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>210%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>400%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>400%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>133%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>433%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>333%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>113%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>105%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>263%</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>397%</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>399%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 illustrates, the number of children’s welfare facilities has increased tenfold over the past ten years. Such a dramatic rise does not just mean quantitative growth. It suggests that Buddhist social welfare has become more responsive to a growing demand for daycare facilities, resulting from women’s increased social participation. Interestingly, this explosive growth did not merely occur in simple daycare services. There has been so much variety in programs as illustrated by daycare centers for special children, special education centers for young children, and children’s centers for treatment and counseling. Such variety has become more visible than ever, with specialized programs provided by Buddhist groups often cited as exemplary cases in the Korean welfare community.

Growing numbers of homes for the elderly demonstrate that the aging society is an issue of concern for the Buddhist welfare community as well. According to the United Nations, a country is classified as an aging society if over 7 percent of its population is 65 years and older. By U.N. standards, Korea is an aging society, with 8.3 percent of its population 65 years and older. Elder care facilities have also seen an eightfold increase in number, which speaks volumes for the growing awareness of the Buddhist welfare community about our ageing society. This is quite significant, although there is still a shortage of facilities relative to the number of needy elderly.

Qualitative Growth

The dramatic growth shown in Korean Buddhist social welfare was not just qualitative. As Korea struggled to emerge from political and social chaos after liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, and to lift herself out of poverty after the subsequent Korean War, Buddhist welfare services prioritized relief work. Over the course of Korea’s fast economic development between 1970 and 1995, the main concern of Buddhist social welfare shifted to stabilizing local communities and social integration. This suggests that the Buddhist community has grown more receptive to the need for a wide array of specialized programs to
better meet the demands of recipients. Furthermore, it has become increasingly aware of its obligation to bring about measures to encourage public participation in welfare programs.

In line with this, the following welfare facilities run by Buddhist groups for the past 10 years serve the following functions:

1. Service for the handicapped: Its main emphasis lies in rehabilitation so that people with disabilities are able to become productive members of society. Facilities include group rehabilitation homes, daycare centers, workplaces, rehabilitation centers, and welfare centers.
2. Service for senior citizens: With a growing demand for daycare and short-term care, there are more than ten registered homebound care centers, including volunteer groups, that reach out to the nation’s frail and elderly.
3. Community social welfare centers: Community welfare centers are most ideal in delivering comprehensive welfare services for stabilizing and integrating communities and society. Their services extend to the specific target groups of the elderly, disabled, children, families, youths, and low-income families. Community welfare centers are at the heart of welfare services with their various programs aimed at strengthening the family system, developing the local community, caring for the poor and vulnerable, assisting low-income families, offering volunteer work, and providing counseling services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Social welfare center</th>
<th>Center for the disabled</th>
<th>Center for senior citizens</th>
<th>Total number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Currently, there are over 60 community welfare centers run by Buddhist groups. Statistics show that an average of 700 people enjoy services offered by one community center a day, bringing the total number of people who use community centers daily to approximately 42,000.

Implications of the Growth of Buddhist Social Welfare in Korea

As discussed above, Buddhist social welfare services have shown remarkable growth, which has a number of implications. First of all, the robust growth signifies that the Buddhist welfare community has been actively embracing advanced practices and systems. The Buddhist welfare community put in place modern and systematic welfare activities in parallel with welfare services provided by the public sector and other religious groups, a clear break from its past tradition of relying on temples and individual monks. This suggests that Buddhist welfare has been integrated to the overall welfare system.

Second, the Buddhist community is stepping up its efforts to provide more specialized welfare services. For instance, each organization offers about 50 to 70 different programs, some of which focus on skill training or individual interest areas to cater to the needs of contemporary society, while others are offered free to low-income beneficiaries; most venues for the programs are run by trained staff and professional teachers.

Third, there is still a lack of effort to build facilities owned by Buddhist organizations. Although there is a growing number of programs and services, a high percentage of them are delivered through government-run facilities in accordance with the policy of cooperation between the public and private welfare providers. This imposes limitations on the ability of Buddhist groups to present faith-based programs and spiritual counseling to the public, giving rise to the need for welfare centers run by Buddhists themselves.
Fourth, the rapid quantitative and qualitative development of Buddhist welfare campaigns points to a growing sense of enthusiasm about social work within the Buddhist community. Surely, this will serve as a seedbed for the further development of Buddhist social welfare in the years to come.

Prospects of Korean Buddhist Social Welfare

To suggest that Buddhist social welfare activities are somehow inferior to those of other religions because they lack their own facilities might fuel the misperception that faith-based welfare is a field driven by competition among the different participating religions. In other words, the number of welfare facilities does not necessarily translate into more compassion. The real question to ask is whether the basic theories and philosophies of Buddhism truly encourage social engagement and promote humanitarianism. In the meantime, it is imperative to effectively redefine the relationship between public and Buddhist welfare systems.

The Korean Buddhist community is dedicated to securing the funds and talents desperately needed to further develop welfare systems through locating and mobilizing widely scattered resources such as monasteries, mission centers, and human resources. At the same time, it is committed to coming up with facility operation guidelines and specialized programs. Each order of Buddhism has established its own welfare service model by making policies or plans, and educating front line welfare workers.

The remarkable development of Buddhist welfare services would not have been possible if Buddhism did not have 1600 years of tradition in Korea and if its legacy had not been deeply rooted in people's sentiments. For the past ten years, Buddhist social welfare has seen major developments. I would like to offer cautious optimism that the next ten years will see another burst of growth comparable to its history so far. With growing public interest in well-being, the future will see a greater allocation of resources to social welfare. People's growing desire for welfare will be accompanied by more demand and a budget increase in this field.

Conditions for Further Development

As mentioned above, it is imperative to mobilize all organizational resources such as temples, regional, and religious affairs authorities, and to become more policy wise in order to build on the past success. In addition, future development calls for an active response to changes on the front line and a shift in the government's welfare policies and people's demand. In order to further develop Buddhist welfare in Korea, a number of conditions need to be fulfilled.

First, the Buddhist community must nurture talented people who have a firm spiritual background. Religious teachings shape people's values. People's values shape their actions. Therefore, nurturing individuals who practice altruism and bodhisattva precepts is prerequisite for the development of Buddhist welfare services, because providers themselves need to understand that Buddhism does benefit and enrich all sentient beings.

Second, it is crucial to pool human and organizational resources to improve the overall quality of welfare services. To help achieve this goal, the Buddhist community first needs to put in place a system that would secure and draw all necessary resources from temples and regional organizations.

Third, local temples and monasteries should be mandated to implement one or more meaningful welfare programs. In other words, each temple should be able to provide or assist welfare services.

Fourth, more spiritual programs that contribute to social integration need to be developed in order to increase the variety of services offered. An increasing desire for faith-based social services creates a demand for facilities run by Buddhist organizations. Currently a large number of welfare services provided by Buddhist groups are delivered through public facilities, making it difficult to implement spiritual programs.
Conclusion

Buddhism teaches that all sentient beings have Buddha nature. One can become a Buddha or an awakened one in due course if s/he diligently practices compassion and exercises the bodhisattva precepts. Such a spirit of compassion and the bodhisattva mind extended to the needy was manifest in the collective, active engagement in social welfare throughout history. This inspiration is not just confined to the Buddhist community, but also takes the form of a public welfare system in modern society.

Some areas of responsibility for social welfare were shifted from the government to the private sector with a growing sense of crisis about the western model of the welfare state in the 1980s. Consequently, religious groups, among other private sector players, came to constitute an integral part of welfare service. Korean Buddhist welfare activities, which entirely relied on temples and monasteries in the past, now encompass a wide array of specialized programs in order to extend the spirit of compassion and the bodhisattva mind to the distressed in response to changing private welfare needs.

The Buddhist welfare community is determined to bring about the ideal of normalization and social integration through a wide variety of facilities, namely childcare facilities, daycare centers, volunteer groups, shelters, rehabilitation facilities, counseling centers, and community welfare centers. Their target groups include children, youth, the handicapped, the elderly, families, and communities.

Buddhist social welfare activities delivered on the platform of the Buddha’s teachings will no doubt experience remarkable growth in the coming years. The Korean Buddhist welfare community, on the basis of a firm spiritual background, is well positioned to take the initiative in developing social welfare in modern society. It only needs ceaseless work to realize the vision of the Land of Utmost Bliss (Bulguk) in today’s society.

NOTES

2. The term “sunim” refers to both monks and nuns.
The Buddhist Women’s Movement for Social Change

Insook Kim

Korea is experiencing a period of rapid social change in all aspects of life. One of the major tasks Korea faces as a country is to find a solution to the pressing issues of social change and ways to adopt and live together in harmony and respect for each other. Classical sociologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries thought that religion would either disappear or gradually decrease with the expansion of modern institutions and technology. However, religion remains vibrant and continues to be a potent factor in the emerging global order, along with the world’s conflicts. Religion has long been recognized as a significant source of personal and collective power, one that can not be neglected.

Buddhists, as individuals and as a group, are part of the country’s social change and we are forced to find ways to express our views on the major social issues that affect all of us. In this paper, I will describe the work of the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute of Korea and how the institute tries to help women in Korea, especially Buddhist women, deal with the changes in their lives.

The Founding of the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute (BWDI) of Korea

The Buddhist Women’s Development Institute of Korea was founded November 27, 2000, in Seoul, Korea. The official purpose and goals of the BWDI were:

1. To believe in, understand, and practice the teachings of Buddhism;
2. To understand and reevaluate outstanding female Buddhists in Korean history and continue their great work;
3. Through the teachings of the Buddha, to create a new image and role for women in the 21st century.

One of the main purposes of the BWDI was to recognize the inequality that exists in our society between the men and women. Even though the Buddha stressed equality of the sexes as far back as 2600 years ago, the barriers and discrimination faced by women in Korean society and especially among conservatives in the Buddhist community are evident. In spite of these difficulties, female Korean Buddhists have been an instrumental force in keeping Korean Buddhism strong in spirit, which has led to the well-being of families and of the nation as a whole. The work of female Buddhists has long been underestimated and neglected. It is only fitting that the BWDI aim to correct prejudices toward women and help women find their proper and equal place in our society, especially in the Buddhist community.
Major Areas of the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute’s Work

Before I go into the specific work carried out by the BWDI, the most important accomplishment of the BWDI was the fact the Institute was created at all. There were many concerns and reasons for forming such an organization on a national scale, all of which had been under consideration for a very long time. To give some idea of the various kinds of work carried out by the BWDI, I will review the major programs conducted during the organization’s first official year, 2001. The main programs included:

**Public classes.** Six marriage and family economics management classes were held. These classes helped provide insight into the importance of healthy family values. In addition, guidelines were given for skillfully managing family finances.

**Classes on Buddhism for Women.** These classes aimed to teach women some of the important teachings of the Buddha and to help them to establish the role of woman as important participants in Korean society according to the teachings of the Buddha. By inviting speakers from all sectors of society, the classes aimed to compare and create new roles for women Buddhists as active agents in the social movement.

**Buddhist Birthday celebration.** On the occasion of the Buddha’s birthday celebration, the members of BWDI helped to make lotus lanterns as a group and let the general public know about the existence of BWDI. It is extremely important for the newly established BWDI members to work as group, especially during festivals, to promote cohesiveness and good working relationships.

**Work with Juvenile Offenders and Visits to Correctional Facilities.** By visiting correctional facilities once a month on Saturdays, volunteers played the role of missing family members to juveniles and helped them readjust to society upon their release. By arranging networks with local Buddhist temples, the offenders could have a temporary place to stay when they are released.

**Volunteering Work at the Nanum Jip.** Volunteers work to assist aging “comfort women.” During World War II, many young Korean girls were taken away from their families against their will. They were sent to the battle zones around Southeast Asia, such as Burma, the Philippines, and Indonesia in order to “serve” Japanese soldiers. Many of those women died of old age or never disclosed their identity. However, some of them are fighting for their lost youth and demanding apologies from the Japanese government.

**Early Childhood Training Workshop and Playroom Activities.** This workshop aims to develop programs for children at the centers run and supervised by Buddhist organizations. It is encouraging to see that many Buddhist temples are now opening their own facilities for families with small children so that the children will learn the teachings of Buddhism at an early age. These programs help parents so that mothers can work without worrying about their children.

**Buddhist Way of Ancestral Worship.** For centuries, ceremonial worship services for deceased ancestors was one of the most important family rituals in Korea. Regardless of religion, the teaching of Confucius regarding devotion to ancestors was an important tradition to most Koreans. However, with the changing times, BWDI tries to find modified ways of conducting these ceremonies, with a special emphasis on Buddhism.

**Implementing New Paternal Family Headship System.** Traditionally, children take the last name of their fathers. However, when the couple divorces, the law demands that the child keep the last name of the divorced father even if the stepfather consents to the adoption to the child. It quite often happens that different siblings have different last names in the same family. The women activists of Korea demand that the choice of last name should be left open, so that a child can choose the last name of the biological father or the stepfather when the family breaks up and remarriage occurs. The BWDI supports the new paternal family headship system.
Cooperation with Other Civil Organizations. In order to network and have good working relationships with other NGO's in Korea, it is imperative that BWDI participate in major social issues along with other civic organizations.

Registration as a Non-profit Organization with the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourist Information. Surprisingly, there was no Buddhist women's organization that was officially registered with the Korean government. In comparison to the other religious organizations, such as YWCA, Buddhist women had no official organization to represent themselves. It is urgently needed that Buddhists form groups and represent themselves as a voice to the Korean government and express their concerns and wishes.

One of BWDI's meaningful activities in subsequent years has been the selection of 108 outstanding women Buddhist during the year 2003. These women were selected from all sectors of Korean society for their devotion and their sacrifices, even sacrificing their lives, in the service of the Buddha's teachings. By gathering these 108 hard-working women in one place, their collective effort is enhanced. This event helped to create a network among Buddhist women and encourage them to further pursue their work as individuals and as groups. The BWDI aims to select 108 outstanding Buddhist women every other year, so that a strong, supportive group will emerge and eventually grow to be a powerful and active organization.

Role of Buddhist Women's Development Institute

For many, an interest in religion is primarily a personal and individualistic endeavor. Most of us are apt to focus on the more intellectual and emotional aspects of ethics and belief. This is probably more evident among Buddhists than among the participants in any other religion. According James B. Pratt, Buddhism became modified as it traveled in three directions from its point of origin in northern India in 6 BCE.

Religion is probably the most important and persistent social institution and is an integral part of the structure of a society. Religion plays an important role in the organization and patterning of people’s behavior. One of the intriguing intellectual phenomena of this century is the widespread interest in the religion during a time when society is experiencing such rapid change. Westernization and modernization in Korea has had a considerable effect on our social structures and behavior patterns, especially in our family life. However, family stability and cohesiveness remain highly valued elements in our society.

One of the main objectives of the BWDI is to help restore troubled family relationships and educate the families about more harmonious ways of living through the teachings of the Buddha. Korean woman have been instrumental in the evolution of the Korean religious experience throughout our history, even when they may have been looked down upon as merely being submissive wives. However, new roles for women are emerging and the picture is bright and promising.

The formation of the Buddhist Women's Development Institute is only the beginning of the new trend of women's participation toward social change for the better. We strongly urge that the BWDI attract more attention and, through the support and encouragement of fellow Buddhists, hope that it can grow and continue to do the work it has set out to do.

Before closing, I feel I must give my endless gratitude to the many people who were involved in founding BWDI. In particular, I would like to mention the support of Do Young Sunim who saw the need for the BWDI and gave us his valuable time and wisdom for its creation. Also, I would like to give a big hug to professor In Ja Lee who served as our president for the past four years. Without her dedication, it would have been impossible to survive and grow. Buddhism, by nature of its religious attitude, tends to be a quiet observer. However, the changing times require a different Buddhism.

I sincerely hope the BWDI is only the beginning and that there will be 108 more Buddhist Women's Development Institutes in the next ten years.
NOTES


A major contemporary criticism of Theravāda Buddhism is its tradition of clinging to an inherently patriarchal structure. This structure hinders the Buddhist nuns in being recognized for their contributions to society. One of the significant contributions of Buddhist nuns in society is that they have given counseling to people in their communities. Individuals seek out certain respected and insightful nuns when they encounter situations such as a meaning-of-life crisis, loss of a loved one, family problems, decision-making difficulties, anxiety and stress, problems with anger, and so forth. Rather than simply saying a few prayers and giving a blessing, these nuns, grounded in the depth of the Buddhist teachings and practices, have developed ways of counseling and mentoring.

This paper reveals the four essential characteristics of the mentoring performed by two Buddhist nuns: (1) the attributes of effective mentors, (2) the impact that the Buddhist teachings have on individual mentorees, (3) the active role that individuals need to play in their own transformation process, and (4) the significance of trust and appreciation for the nuns. A consideration of the four essential characteristics of the mentoring performed by these two Buddhist nuns provides a much needed perspective of how the nuns help individuals develop an understanding of human predicaments and how they assist individuals in dealing with their problems. Moreover, understanding the essential characteristics of Buddhist mentoring is valuable for other nuns and individuals who have an interest in being active in their communities and mentoring those in need.

Essential Characteristics of Mentoring by Two Buddhist Nuns

This paper is based on research that I had conducted for my doctoral dissertation. In this research, I selected two case studies to explore the mentoring process performed by two Theravāda Buddhist nuns. One case study involved a nun named Mae chii Sansanee Sthirasuta and four individuals from Bangkok who came to her for consultation. The other case study involved a nun named Sayamagi Rina Sircar and four individuals from San Francisco who received guidance and insight from her.

My strategy for conducting the study was to interview the two Theravāda Buddhist nuns and the eight individuals. The purpose of interviewing the nuns was to have the nuns discuss their lives, work, and insights. Following this, I interviewed the individuals who consulted the nuns to assess the effect of the consultation on their issues, their understanding of their dilemmas, and their daily lives.

My findings suggest that the nuns had gained a comprehension of the human condition based on their own real-life experience and their own previous healing and transformation. Their understanding of Buddhist teachings and practices provided a foundation for their methods of mentoring. The separate interviews with the eight individuals revealed some similarities and some differences. One of the similarities was that all of the individuals had a common goal, that is, they sought to understand and alleviate their
emotional distress. Some of the differences were the circumstances of their emotional distress: loss of loved ones, unresolved conflicts with others, anxiety, anger, decision-making difficulties, loss in direction of life, and finding purpose of life.

From these findings, I have identified the essential characteristics of the mentoring process to gain an understanding of how these two Buddhist nuns assist individuals in dealing with their problems and how the individuals themselves work to overcome their own distress. The four essential characteristics of mentoring performed by the two Buddhist nuns will be discussed one by one.

Attributes of Effective Mentors

The mentoring provided by the two Buddhist nuns revealed certain attributes of the mentors. Both Mae Chii Sansanee and Sayamagi Rina used the ancient Buddhist teachings to guide themselves through their own personal transformation process and to cultivate the Four Sublime States (brahmavihāras) taught by the Buddha as a path to liberation. Buddhism was not something that the nuns simply “added on” to their personality. Rather, they became embodiments of the Buddhist teachings, as exemplified through their wisdom, compassion, and ability to inspire confidence in those who come to them for help.

During the time of the Buddha, individuals sought qualified teachers from within their own Saṅghas to study with, in an effort to develop spiritual wisdom. In the Therīgāthā, there is a Pāli phrase, “ye me saddhayika auh,” or “one who is fit to be trusted by me, or who is worthy of my confidence.” Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a Buddhist nun and scholar, writes:

Wisdom and mature judgment are required to discern what will ultimately benefit and what will impede our spiritual growth. Nuns, monks, and others who have undergone many years of formal training have a special responsibility to understand traditions and interpret them for others.¹

The Buddha instructed monks and nuns to cultivate the Four Sublime States as the path of purification: (1) mettā (2) karunā, (3) muditā, and (4) upekkhā. These sublime states are cultivated from within and are practiced in relation to sentient beings.

Mettā is a Pāli term meaning loving-kindness. Mettā is not a quality that individuals are not born with, but need to cultivate. Loving-kindness which is the wish for all beings to be happy. Loving-kindness is boundless love and is given without an expectation of receiving anything in return.

The Buddhist teachings distinguish loving-kindness from the conventional understanding of love. Thittila speaks to this difference, explaining that loving-kindness is “without a desire to possess but with a desire to help, to sacrifice self-interest for the welfare and well-being of humanity. This love is without any selection or exclusion.”² Loving-kindness is described as the unconditional love for oneself and for all beings. It reflects the development of complete acceptance and openness to all people and all situations.

Karunā is translated as compassion. The Dalai Lama states that genuine compassion is based on a clear acceptance or recognition that others, like oneself, want happiness and have the right to overcome suffering.³ On that basis, one develops concern about the welfare of others, irrespective of one’s attitude to oneself.

Jeffrey Hopkins explains that compassion is often intertwined with wisdom.⁴ Compassion and wisdom require an individual to develop the capacity to make correct choices with regards to what actions to take to minimize suffering for others and oneself. Sometimes this may require forceful actions to help others overcome suffering and sometimes it may require intentionally refraining from actions entirely.

Compassion and wisdom need to be developed together. Compassion without wisdom may lead to great suffering. Wisdom without compassion tends to feed tendencies toward arrogance. When compassion and wisdom develop together, individuals begin to connect with more expanded realms of consciousness.
Muditā is translated as sympathy. As Singhathon Narasabho explains it, “Muditā implies sympathy, gladness or appreciation. It conveys rejoicing at the prosperity, success or happiness of fellow beings. It is a congratulatory attitude expressed on the occasion of good works done by others.”

The Buddha often instructed monks and nuns to act with sympathy. For example, in the Sigala Sutta, the Buddha spoke to a son of the Sigala clan regarding the practice of sympathy:

> Householders should attend to wanderers and Brahmins with loving physical, verbal, and mental activities, by keeping their doors open, and by providing material sustenance. Wanderers and Brahmins thus attended will sympathize with householders in six ways: they will turn the householders away from evil, establish them in auspicious practices, sympathize with them through kindness, cause him to hear what he had not heard before, clarify what he had heard before, and teach him the path to heaven.

Sympathy can be expressed by listening to the householders’ past experiences and present needs, and revealing a clue towards the path of liberation. Harvey Aronson says that sympathy is a motivating force that generates “active friendship” and is linked to acts of charity and aspects of the moral code. Both Mae chii Sansanee and Sayamagi Rina have the opportunity to relay their sympathy to the lay community by giving meditation instruction as one method to help liberate others from suffering. They are increasingly renowned for providing consultation when individuals come for help to resolve their daily life and spiritual concerns.

Upekkā means equanimity. Narasabho describes it thus:

> Upekkā is equanimity, impartiality or even-mindedness. It refers to a state of mind through which one contemplates with disinterestedness tending to a state of centrality and, keeping the mind unaffected by either attractive or impulsive conditions.

As part of the nuns’ meditation practice, both Mae chii Sansanee and Sayamagi Rina are trained to cultivate equanimity in order to develop non-attachment to strong emotions that arise from meditation insight, namely “bliss.” When nuns cultivate the sublime attitude of equanimity, they gain inner peace. This inner peace manifests in their support and encouragement of others to bring peace into their lives.

In sum, the mentoring performed by the two Buddhist nuns reveals the importance of the nuns’ personal attributes. Both of the nuns inspire their mentorees by embodying the Buddha’s teachings. The nuns manifest the Four Sublime States in their actions, which establishes a basis of trust and inspires those who seek help to understand their distress.

**The Impact of the Buddhist Teachings on Mentorees**

The individuals from Bangkok emphasized that the understanding of Dharma that they gained from Mae chii Sansanee’s teachings helped them to see things differently. For example, one individual who had lost her son was able to overcome her grief by understanding the Buddha’s teachings about the “nature of reality,” namely, suffering and impermanence.

The individuals from San Francisco highlighted the use of *vipassanā* meditation, which they learned from and practiced with Sayamagi Rina. The practice of meditation helped them reflect upon their thoughts and feelings. *Vipassanā*, or insight meditation, is an indigenous form of meditation found in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. The core of *vipassanā* is the practice of mindfulness meditation. Thynn explains:
Sati, or mindfulness, implies there is action of the mind. We purposely set ourselves to pay attention to our minds.... Normally, our minds are in constant motion, thinking, feeling, endlessly flitting from one thing to another. Because of this perpetual motion, there is little room for awareness to arise. Awareness may peek through at times, but is too timid. It is sluggish and dull. Most often our noisy thoughts and emotions dominate the scene. The mind must get out of this perpetual cycle for awareness to arise fully.8

Training the mind to pay attention to the contents of thoughts and emotions is the purpose of the practice of mindfulness meditation. In this type of meditation, meditators begin by observing their breath. Whenever thoughts or emotions arise, they simply watch these “mental activities” as they flow in and out of their mind, without getting emotionally involved or mentally caught up in them. This practice assists meditators to transform their negative emotions.

Overall, the mentoring provided by these two Buddhist nuns revealed that the individuals who sought release from their distress derived great benefit from the Dharma teachings given by the nuns. They were able to apply the teachings and practice meditation to transform their distress.

The Active Role of the Individual in the Transformation Process

The third essential aspect of the mentoring process facilitated by the two Buddhist nuns can be summed up by a passage from the Dhammapada. In this classic Buddhist collection of verse, the Buddha advises, “The wise man will not look for the faults of others, nor for what they have done or left undone, but will look rather to his own misdeeds.”9 A way for individuals to cultivate the quality of wisdom is to first look within themselves for the cause of their distress, rather than automatically attributing it to the faults or actions of others. This requires an individual to have the strength of mind to acknowledge their own mistakes, faults, and imperfections.

Investigating the roles that individual mentorees play in the process of transformation, I found that each individual made a deliberate effort to transform their distress. They accomplished this through a willingness to be actively involved in a process of introspection, which led to their deepened sense of self-awareness.

Alan Watts observes, “We are to be fully human and fully alive and aware, it seems that we must be willing to suffer for our pleasures. Without such willingness, there can be no growth in the intensity of consciousness.”10 When individuals are unwilling to reflect upon and deal with the deeper meaning of their suffering, they deflect and prolong their healing process.

Culver writes, “The refusal to accept suffering as a natural part of life can lead to viewing oneself as a perpetual victim and blaming others for our problems – a surefire recipe for a miserable life.”11 This comment stresses that suffering is an inherent part of life and that when individuals hold an unrealistic expectation that they must always be happy, they are more prone to blame themselves or others when they do not get what they want.

As the individuals reflected upon and dealt with the deeper meaning of the issues they faced, they were able to come to a point of more objective introspection. This introspection was crucial because it enabled them to have a closer and more unbiased view of themselves. It also allowed them to examine the causes of their suffering, and brought attention to the content of their thoughts. What emerged from looking into their thoughts and reflecting on their previous actions were new perceptions of the causes of their distress.
The Significance of Trust and Appreciation for the Nuns

The fourth essential characteristic of the mentoring process was the significance of trust and appreciation for the two Buddhist nuns. The individuals in San Francisco slowly built up their trust for Sayamagi Rina by interacting with her and observing her actions, both toward herself and others. When they were finally assured of Sayamagi Rina’s genuineness and kindness, they opened themselves to trust her, and, importantly, to trust their own process. Alex Berzin writes:

Our trust derives from having built up, over time, long-term relationships with [spiritual mentors] so that we are totally convinced of their integrity. In the process of gaining trust in our mentors, we also come to trust in ourselves that we can improve by bonding with them. The security gained from this realization allows us to be receptive to their positive influence and to be open to change.12

According to Berzin, one of the benefits of learning to trust ones’ mentors is the strengthening of the capacity to trust in oneself, which in turn helps to reduce fears of connecting with others.

In conjunction with trust, there is a growing awareness, appreciation, and acceptance of the kindness offered by the spiritual mentors. The ability to appreciate someone else’s kindness requires that individuals put aside their own sense of pride. This involves a natural reduction of an individual’s arrogance. When individuals are not too self-absorbed with their own needs for independence and pride, they were open to receiving or appreciating what the nuns had to offer them.

This fourth essential aspect of the mentoring process shows that trust and appreciation for the two Buddhist nuns provided an optimal context for effective mentoring. Trust and appreciation made it possible for the qualities of compassion and wisdom to pass from the nuns to the individuals.

Summary

In summary, the mentoring process which involved two Buddhist nuns and eight other individuals demonstrates four essential characteristics: the attributes of the mentors, the impact of the Buddhist teachings, the active role that the individuals need to play in their transformation process, and the significance of trust and appreciation for the nuns. The implications of these four essential characteristics of mentoring by these two nuns are that Buddhist nuns can offer valuable contributions to society and that the Buddhist teachings are made relevant by helping people deal with some common problems in their daily lives and by nurturing spiritual insight.

NOTES


Mapping the Trajectories of Engaged Buddhism from China to Taiwan and Vietnam

Elise DeVido

The impetus for this paper arose at the 4th Annual Conference on the Thought of Yinshun held in Taiwan in 2003, when I was assured by Taiwanese scholars that the concept of “engaged Buddhism” propagated by Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh derived from Ven. Yinshun’s ideas about renjian fojiao, “Humanistic Buddhism.” This seemingly simple statement piqued my curiosity, so I investigated further into the existing literature on engaged Buddhism further and corresponded with several founding members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and scholars of Buddhism in Vietnam.

When I then compared these findings with my readings and fieldwork on contemporary Buddhism in Taiwan, I found that early in the 20th century, Vietnamese reformist monks were directly inspired, not by Yinshun, but by his teacher, the Chinese monk Taixu (1890-1974) and Taixu’s “Humanistic Buddhism” (renjian fojiao; Vietnamese: nhan gian phat giao). The seeds of Taixu’s ideas planted in Vietnam not only resulted in institutions which organized and educated a modernized Saṅgha, but “…managed to bring about changes in public consciousness which led to a reacquisition of [Buddhism’s] national role in later decades,” with Thich Nhat Hanh and others’ actualized Buddhism in 1960s Vietnam.

Little, if any, comparative research has been done for Taiwan and Southeast Asian Buddhism, so the literature on engaged Buddhism rarely, if ever, mentions Taiwan’s Buddhism and does not note the Taixu link. At the same time, the growing body of works on the history of Buddhism in Taiwan rarely, if ever, draws comparisons with Southeast Asia or even Japan or Korea. This article traces the paths of humanistic Buddhism from China’s Taixu to Vietnam and from Taixu to Taiwan, and explores how different socio-political contexts in Vietnam and Taiwan resulted in various forms of engaged Buddhism. It goes most in depth about the various manifestations of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan, especially the engaged Buddhism propagated by the radical activist Ven. Zhaohui, about whom next to nothing is written in English. It is hoped that the findings of this paper may contribute to the ongoing debates about the origin, definitions, and varieties of engaged Buddhism as it highlights both the innovations and limitations of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan.

Besides the case of Vietnam, many scholars have discussed the alliance of Buddhism and national liberation movements, from the 19th century on, throughout Southeast and East Asia. It is remarkable to see how in each case the revival of Buddhism (whether state-directed, state-approved, or from the people below) was seen as the way to assert each nation’s “authentic” identity. Each case seems to be an attempt to unify and strengthen the nation in the face of the Western onslaught, whether colonialism or modernization or both. Then Buddhism faced a new set of global trends, such as the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s; and the peace and human rights movements in Latin America, East Europe, South Africa, and Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. Now again, Buddhism must deal with the contemporary challenges of
globalization. While always keeping in mind crucial differences in social and historical contexts, it is vital to keep a transnational perspective to avoid claims of “uniqueness” by any one Buddhist tradition or Buddhist movement.

The Chinese Buddhist Revival

According to Holmes Welch, in China:

The Buddhist revival, I believe, began as an effort by laymen to reprint the sūtras destroyed in the Taiping Rebellion [1860s]. It gathered momentum as the discovery of Western Buddhist scholarship stimulated the need for Chinese Buddhist scholarship, and as the invasion of China by Christian evangelists and missionaries led to the idea of training Buddhist evangelists and sending missionaries to India and the West. Up to this point only laymen were involved… But in the last years of the Ch’ing dynasty [late 19th–early 20th c.], when moves were made to confiscate their property for use in secular education, the monks began to organize schools and social-welfare enterprises as a means of self-defense.³

Welch believes that three threads run through the Chinese Buddhist revival: (1) the need to secure religious identity by the laypeople; (2) the need for economic self preservation on part of the monastics; and (3) the need to gain international status (cachet), by both lay and monastics.⁴ Speaking of the Buddhist reformers in early 20th-century China, he says, “The need for status—intellectual status—led to the necessity of meeting the challenges of science and Western philosophy, of Marxism, and of Christianity. It helped to bring about the revival of interest in Dharmalaksana (Faxiang zong, Consciousness Only School), the birth of Buddhist scientism, and participation in modern, Western forms of social welfare.”⁵

The major figure in the Chinese Buddhist revival was the monk Taixu who expressed ideas about “Buddhism for Human Life” (rensheng fojiao) and “Humanistic Buddhism” (renjian fojiao). Instead of waiting and praying for the glories of the Pure Land in a future life through the intercession of Amitabha, “Taixu visualized this earthly world transformed by the dedication and sacrificial hard work of thousands of average bodhisattvas…,”⁶ both monastic and lay. These bodhisattvas would ideally work in tandem with a stable and enlightened government.

Welch finds that the Buddhist revival of the modern period (late Qing and early Republican period) was characterized by new elements such as the growth of lay organizations and lay teachers of the Dharma; the growth of clinics, orphanages, and schools; the founding of a radio station in Shanghai; proselytizing in prisons; and the effort to start an ecumenical movement with Buddhists abroad. Also, the modern revival saw Buddhist publishing houses, reorganized seminaries for Buddhist monastics, and national Buddhist associations. All of the above innovations were directly or indirectly indebted to the vision and reforms of Taixu.⁷

Taixu’s political stance is not easily categorized. He came of age during the heady years of the 1911 revolution, and his friends and colleagues included revolutionaries, anarchists, and socialists. At first, he admired socialism because it, like Buddhism, he claimed, advocated human equality and social welfare. He liked socialism’s message “from each according to his abilities; to each according to his needs.”⁸ In the beginning, he was optimistic that socialism could curb the excesses of individualism as well as monopolies and large corporations that exploited national and international markets and created growing disparities between rich and poor.

After 1925, however, Taixu rejected Communism’s call for violent class conflict and overemphasis on the material and the collective while neglecting the mind, the body, and the individual. His political stance
became situated “right of center” partly for ideological reasons and partly for pragmatic reasons (to obtain political imprimatur for his plans to reform and modernize Buddhism, and to proselytize abroad). As Don Pittman has shown, Taixu not only propagated his vision of a modern, human-centered Buddhism within China, but also hoped to transform Buddhism into a global movement that would transcend narrow nationalisms and lead to world peace. Towards this end, Taixu traveled to Taiwan, Japan, and Hong Kong (1917-1925); then to France, England, Belgium, Germany, and the United States (1928-1929), as well as to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, India, and Malaysia (1939-1940). In Sri Lanka, homeland of the great Buddhist revivalist Dharmapala, Taixu spoke at length with the Buddhist scholar G. P. Malalasekera about forming a world Buddhist federation. In 1950, this plan came to fruition when Dr. Malalasekera founded the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

In the mid-1940s, Taixu briefly considered founding a Buddhist political party. He then thought it sufficient that Buddhists keep up with political affairs and become active member of a political party of their choice, even the Communist party, although he thought monastics should not serve in government. In 1937, Taixu deemed his attempts to inspire “a revolution in Buddhism” to be a failure, due to both his own “weaknesses and failures” as well as the strength of his opponents. He was too self-critical. Besides being the inspiration for several leading Taiwanese Buddhist organizations discussed later in this paper decades after his death in 1947, Taixu profoundly influenced Vietnamese Buddhism in the 1920-30s, which set the stage for its remarkable developments in the 1960-70s.

The Impact of Taixu and the Buddhist Revival in Vietnam

Thien Do believes that Buddhist revival in Vietnam has two main components. First, besides the stimuli of modernization and nationalism in the late nineteenth century, there was the influence of a “reverse Orientalism” as works by Western scholars in Hindu and Buddhist studies were translated in the languages of South, Southeast, and East Asia, and stimulated domestic revivals in a number of Asian nations. Here Thien Do stresses the great influence of Taixu on the Vietnamese Buddhist revival among the urban elites in Vietnam.

Second, participants in the anti-colonial struggle, from the late nineteenth century, turned to the Buddhist Sangha for leadership after the Confucian literati failed at the task. By the 1860s, there already were anti-French uprisings by rural-based lay Buddhist millenarian groups. The period 1885-1898 saw not only lay group resistance, but also armed revolutionary risings by Buddhist monks, as in the 1898 “Monks’ War” in central Vietnam. The French authorities thus intensified their suppression of Buddhism and stepped up their promotion of Catholicism to solidify their colonial rule. “This was the beginning of religious discrimination, an idea that cannot be separated from the whole complex drive toward national independence.” French repression did not stop, but on the contrary stimulated the Vietnamese resistance movements; many Buddhist participants, lay and monastic, sought to propagate Buddhism and make Buddhism institutions stronger throughout Vietnam.

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, “In the 1930s, the Buddhist scholars had already discussed the engagement of Buddhism in the modern society and called it Nhan Gian Phat Giao [Taixu’s renjian fojiao] or engaged Buddhism.” Thien Do says that the Vietnamese version of Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire, Chapter Two, has both “Nhan gian Phat gia” as well as the phrase “mot nen Phat gia dan toc Vietnam” (a foundation for Vietnamese national Buddhism). Thien Do writes that this term was used, “…to describe the widespread issue of reform inspired by the Chinese example at the time, including “the reform of belief, and abolishment of superstition.” It was part of a pre-World War awakening to the necessity of defining a national identity through Buddhism, but this issue has been considered an urban elite-driven one.…“ Although Taixu did not visit Vietnam, in the 1920s, his writings had already been translated by reformist monk Thien Chieu. Thien Chieu also propagated Taixu’s Reorganization of the Sangha System (Zhengli sengqie zhidu lun) among monks in north Vietnam. An example is his “Essay on Atheistic Buddhism”
(Fojiao wushen lun, Phat gia vo than luan), which was at once an argument as to why the Consciousness Only School is superior to the Pure Land and Chan traditions, and a critique of Christianity. His bold reformist “...plan called for Chinese Buddhism to be reshaped institutionally with new model monasteries, benevolent organizations, and educational ventures.”21 These writing were among the key documents, along with the periodical Hai Chao Yin (Sound of the Tide) and the publications of Shanghai Buddhist organizations, that inspired the Buddhist revival taking place in Vietnam.22

At first, this “actualized” Buddhism concentrated on educating the monastics, propagating Buddhism through publications and lectures, forming local and regional Buddhist associations, building lay “self-cultivation” groups, and forming Buddhist youth groups. The revival before 1945 was mainly limited to urban educated groups, however. Buddhists were not as yet widely politically engaged and welfare provision had not gone far beyond the traditional model of short-term welfare aid provided by temples.23 But after World War II, with the rise to power by the Viet Minh, the subsequent Indochinese war, and the partition of Vietnam, the “…Buddhist intellectuals were now realizing the position of Buddhism in a new political orientation.”24 In 1951, Buddhists from all over Vietnam came together for the first time to form a national association. “The collective yearning for a non-violent solution to the armed conflict appeared more urgent…”25 The Diem regime’s repression of intellectuals, businesses, youth, and Buddhist groups united Buddhists and non-Buddhists into an anti-government movement that culminated in the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc and others in mid-1963. “For the first time the word ‘struggle’ (dau tranh) was used in official sangha language.”26

Thich Nhat Hanh and the Origin of the Term “Engaged Buddhism”

It is vital to note that Thich Nhat Hanh became a novice at the Tu Hieu monastery in the Linzhi Chan tradition. He prepared for and received full ordination in 1949 at the Bao Quoc Institute, one of the fruits of the 1930s Buddhist revival movement in Vietnam.27 Most scholars trace the term “engaged Buddhism” to Thich Nhat Hanh and the early 1960s Vietnamese socio-political crises.28 For Sallie B. King, “engaged Buddhism” of any kind begins with Thich Nhat Hanh, with no mention of Vietnamese history, Taixu, or other Southeast Asian developments.

Christopher Queen also notes French influence: “...it seems likely that the French term ‘engage,’ meaning politically outspoken or involved, was common among activist intellectuals in French Indochina in the 1960s.”29 I asked Thien Do his opinion on this quote. He agrees that Sartrean terminology was in vogue in Saigon the early 60s and that Dan than became the Vietnamese term for Sartre’s engage – dan meaning to go forward, to push; than, the body. Yet, he says:

I don't really know when the actual term “engaged Buddhism” was first used by Vietnamese writers, if at all. I could only tell when the idea of engaged Buddhism was first promoted by Thich Nhat Hanh and his group…. In the early 1960s, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote of bien dai hoa (modernization of Buddhism). I think that was as close as he went to the “engaged” meaning (you know the meaning of the French word actualité, as present reality or current affairs). Another phrase he mentions in Lotus is the Buddhists’ desire to mang dao Phat di vao trong cuoc doi (bring Buddhism into the current of life or day-by-day world).

After Van Hanh [Buddhist] University was established, Thich Nhat Hanh headed the School of Youth for Social Work (phung su xa hoi, lit., “in the service of society”), an interpretation of engaged Buddhism that brought him into tension with other senior members of the Saṅgha around 1963–64. But Sister Chan Khong recounts that these ideas were discussed with him earlier, between 1958 and 1961, when she had already started welfare work with a few friends.30
Perhaps inspired by the example of Catholic welfare institutions and by the Vatican II reforms that called for an emphasis on social justice, younger Buddhists hoped that Vietnamese Buddhism could reinterpret and actualize the bodhisattva’s mission in similar ways, as Taixu had called for a generation earlier.

By no means did all monastics agree with this aspect of engaged Buddhism, however. Thien Do relates how Thich Nhat Hanh was expelled from the An Quang Temple he had helped found, due to his elders’ opposition. But by the mid-1960s, Buddhist monastics and laypeople administered the Buddhist Youth Family Movement, which included orphanages, nursery schools, hospitals, literacy campaigns, first aid classes, and primary and high schools called Bodhi schools located in each province. The purpose of Van Hanh University’s School of Youth for Social Work, mentioned above, was to train young people as cadres to develop rural society.

In 1965, Thich Nhat Hanh founded the Tiep Hien Order, comprised of both monastics and laypersons, to promote the actualization of Buddhism. *Tiep* means “to be in touch with,” “to continue,” while *bien* means “realize in the present;” in English this is translated as the Order of Interbeing. Tiep Hien, based in France, insists on non-sectarianism and non-attachment to views; a focus on actualized Buddhism that relieves suffering here and now; and maintaining a good balance between compassionate social action and meditative/mindfulness practice.

As King relates, Thich Nhat Hanh and his group took a different path than Thich Tri Quang and other monks of the An Quang Temple who engaged in direct political action, organized mass demonstrations, and formed a short-lived political party. As mentioned above, An Quang Temple and Thich Nhat Hanh disagreed about the forms that engaged Buddhism should take. Thich Nhat Hanh was averse to Buddhists’ direct involvement in the formal political system, since this would inevitably violate his fundamental principles of non-dualism and non-partisanship. He believed his group could make the most meaningful contributions outside the self-interested world of political power struggles. “By calling ourselves non-violent we are against all violence, but we are first against the institutional violence.” Furthermore, Thich Nhat Hanh believed that the roots of the war were found in the United States, and thus he focused on peacemaking activities abroad. Yet as King points out, one can argue that the An Quang group justified their direct political involvement within Vietnam as their means of fighting against institutional violence. Thus, King reminds us that the “theoretical questions in the background of a party such as this remain” for Buddhist scholars’ and activists’ further reflection and debate.

From 1963, as the United States escalation of the war resulted in countless civilian deaths, the Buddhist-led anti-war movement exploded in South Vietnam. After experiencing severe repression in 1966, the movement continued through protest literature, civil disobedience, fasting, and forming an “underground railroad” for those who refused to serve in the army. However the movement was never strong enough to realize its goal of acting as a “third force” between the American-backed South and the Communist North. Thich Nhat Hanh was forced into perpetual exile overseas, in France, from 1967.

As happened in China after 1979, from 1990 in Vietnam there has been economic restructuring and reopening of Vietnam to the world. But institutional Buddhism is still tightly controlled by the Communist party-state. The state provides charity and emergency services through state-controlled bodies such as the umbrella Fatherland Front, but allows just a few temples to provide such services on a local and ad hoc basis.

**From Taixu to Yinshun**

Taixu did not live to see the fate of Buddhism in China after 1949. All religions were strictly controlled by the Communist party-state, and, during the Cultural Revolution, were nearly destroyed. After 1979, the atmosphere for the officially controlled religions such as (Chinese) Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Christianity relaxed somewhat. Scholars in China are currently interested in Taixu and Yinshun’s Humanistic
Buddhism, after a long period of neglect. Chen Zimei writes that the Hebei-based monk Ven. Jinghui (b. 1933) promotes Humanistic Buddhism, but this is not the mainstream tradition. Taixu’s legacy is most clearly visible in Taiwan.”

The struggle within the Buddhist Association in China in the 1930s and 1940s between traditionalist monks versus monks who supported Taixu in his reformist efforts continued after 1949 via each monk’s disciples and their circles in Taiwan. Yinsun (1906-2005) was Taixu’s student, a graduate of one of Taixu’s seminaries in China, chief editor of Taixu’s complete works, and is Taixu’s biographer. Due to a number of factors, Yinsun spent his life after 1960 mostly in seclusion, producing a large and sophisticated body of scholarship on Humanistic Buddhism, early Indian Buddhism particularly the Agamas, Madhyamika studies, and Chan. By his own admission, he in no way resembles Taixu the organizer, administrator, and internationalist.

But politics might be the most significant factor. After 1949, Yinsun left China for Hong Kong. In his Jingtu xinlun (New Treatise on the Pure Land) of 1951, Yinsun roundly criticized, from scriptural, historical, and methodological perspectives, popular Pure Land piety as reductionist and full of errors. Though his was certainly not the first, nor the last, critique of popular Pure Land worship, it led to great political trouble for Yinsun. In 1952, Yinsun left Hong Kong to become abbot of the important Shandao Temple in Taipei. He was invited by disciples of Taixu in Taiwan, who were engaged in a political struggle with traditionalists over the leadership of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) and of the future direction and scope of Buddhism in Taiwan.

Yinsun became caught in the fray, was criticized publicly and privately, and it is rumored that his writings were burned in Taizhong (central Taiwan). This took place, of course, in the Cold War context of the 1950s, as the Nationalist government, newly transplanted to Taiwan, carried out repression of the native Taiwanese elite establishment as well as suspected Communist influences. “(S)ome within BAROC even used their influence with the government to have certain Nationalist Party officials issue a statement that Yinsun’s writings were infected with the poison of Communism….”

Yinsun resigned from his post at Shandao Temple, wrote a “self-criticism” asking for pardon, and from that time on retired from public life, and except for serving as an ordination master, devoted his days to scholarship. From 1960, with the election of Baisheng as President of BAROC, the traditionalists have held command in Taiwan’s institutional Buddhism. Extant Buddhist groups in Taiwan who wanted to survive in the Nationalist era after 1949, deferred to BAROC’s authority, which served the Nationalist party-state as “the exclusive representative of Buddhism in Taiwan” until the end of martial law in 1987.

Yet, a number of Buddhist groups claim direct inspiration from Yinsun’s work and vision, thus linking contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism back to Taixu. Still, each of these groups is quite different, both in content of their thought, and their actions, ranging from the radical activist Ven. Zhao Hui to the largest and richest temples in Taiwan today. Unlike the ever-engaged Taixu who worked himself to death at age 57, Yinsun virtually retired from society in 1960, devoted his life to scholarship, and lived to be 100. Both Taixu and Yinsun, as propagators of renjian fojiao, are considered to be the major reformers in 20th-century Chinese Buddhism. Taixu, not Yinsun, was the first to speak of renjian fojiao in 1933: “Zenyang lai jianshe renjian fojiao” [How to establish a humanistic Buddhism]. Here is his definition:

Renjian fojiao is not a Buddhism in which you leave the human realm and become a god or ghost, or for everyone to take monastic vows, go to a temple, or become an eremite in the forest. It’s a Buddhism which, in accordance with Buddhist teachings, reforms society, helps humankind to progress, and improves the whole world.”

In 1930, Taixu discussed the idea of constructing a Pure Land in the human realm. He also employed the term rensheng fojiao, as in his 1928 “Duiyu zhongguo fojiao gemingseng de xunci (Instructions for Chinese Buddhist Revolution’s Monastics),” to stress that “primitive Buddhism” consisted of teachings directed at
humans in the here and now, but that over the centuries, in China and elsewhere, Buddhism had become a religion of ghosts, the dead, and the afterlife.\(^{50}\)

Yinshun agreed, but preferred the term *renjian fojiao* to stress even further the central place of human beings and “this world.” He believed that Taixu did not sufficiently critique the tendencies to deification in Buddhism, such as worship of bodhisattvas, praying to Amida for rebirth in the Pure Land, etc., that had developed over time.\(^{51}\)

Yinshun believed that Buddhism should stress “Here, now, this person….” Taking his inspiration from the Agamas, he stressed the path of taking the bodhisattva’s vow (*pusa yuanxing*), which his students and those inspired by him put into practice as serving society in various forms, in order to create a Pure Land on earth.\(^{52}\) Yet, Yang Huinan holds that for Yinshun, “thought” is more important than “action.”\(^{53}\) Yinshun wrote that one taking the bodhisattva path “should undertake works that benefit others…that benefit humanity,” this itself is intrinsic part of one’s individual cultivation.\(^{54}\) The forms each mission takes will vary, but all should start from a heart filled with wisdom, compassion, and emptiness, towards the goals of helping others and propagating the Dharma.\(^{55}\) Yinshun did not elaborate upon the details. He did not, like Taixu, outline a blueprint for action for the contemporary bodhisattva. The heirs of Yinshun made their own interpretative and methodological leaps from Yinshun’s thought to its actualization in Taiwan society.

Heirs of Taixu and Yinshun: The Three Mountaintops of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan: Foguangshan, Ciji, Dharma Drum Mountain

Some Western scholars have attached the label “engaged Buddhism” to Taiwan’s Humanistic Buddhist groups. Compared to traditional Pure Land or other Buddhist groups in Taiwan, they are, since they are engaged in numerous missions to promote social welfare, education, culture, and environmentalism. But they are not radical activists, not truly *engagé* in the original sense of the term, which I believe meant challenging the status quo. Thus, in the analysis of engaged Buddhism, they should be placed in the category of “social service and welfare.” This becomes clearer when we look at the relation of Buddhist groups to politics in Taiwan over the past thirty years.

André Laliberté compared the record of Buddhists in Taiwan to the contributions of the Presbyterian Church during Taiwan’s democratization process, stating that “…despite their remarkable achievements in the areas of education, welfare provision, and charity – not to mention proselytizing – and despite the fact that they are far more numerous than their Christian compatriots,…Buddhists did not play a comparable role in the process of transition to democracy…One is left with the impression that Buddhists were at best indifferent to politics and at worst hostile to democratization.”\(^{56}\) Throughout his essay, he stresses a consistency among the major Buddhist groups in Taiwan: not straying far from KMT (Nationalist party) direct or indirect patronage and a “…mutual indifference between Buddhist organizations and opposition parties….”\(^{57}\)

Laliberté discusses Buddhist groups in the context of a party/state-directed civil society that emerged in the 1980s, especially after the lifting of martial law in 1987 and passage of the 1989 law that legalized the founding of autonomous civic organizations. He does not speak of a civil society that developed autonomously out of the efforts of underground, opposition, or overseas exile groups active in Taiwan’s democracy movement. He argues that the Nationalist party-state needed the Buddhist groups during their gradual, top-down transition to democracy, so it gave them space to develop, even those groups formally outside of BAROC. He noted that, “As the corporatist structure of the government gradually loosened under the rule of Chiang Ching-kuo [son of Chiang Kai-shek] monks and nuns (like Xingyun of Foguangshan; Zhengyan of Ciji, and Shengyan of Dharma Drum Mountain)…undertook endeavors in areas that were hitherto the preserve…” of the party-state itself.\(^{58}\) As the legitimacy of the Nationalists’ Three People’s
Principles faded away, these areas included education, charity, disaster relief, and Buddhist moral values. Laliberté is saying that Buddhist groups like Foguangshan and Ciji could build their kingdoms outside of the BAROC sphere because they could supply “free goods” that the Nationalist party-state needed during their critical transition to democracy from the 1970s on.

Laliberté points out that the Nationalists always needed the monks of BAROC politically, to endorse domestic policies (thus BAROC never criticized the Nationalist regime for their human rights abuses). BAROC was useful in the ideological fight against Communism, whether in Taiwan or abroad among the overseas Chinese communities or in cooperation with other Buddhist nations, and regularly sent delegates to represent the ROC in various international meetings. From the 1980s, the Nationalists saw the large lay membership of Taiwan’s popular Buddhist temples (many of whose leaders propagate Humanistic Buddhism) as a vital source of political support.59

Now all observers agree that BAROC’s authority and influence has diminished significantly since Taiwan democratized and civil society has flourished. BAROC cannot compete with popular temples rich in lay talent, material resources, and highly effective proselytizing mechanisms. Other temples besides BAROC are now authorized to hold ordination ceremonies for domestic and international monks and nuns.60

**Foguangshan Monastery.** Laliberté astutely describes the political behavior and degree of “social engagement” of the Foguangshan temple organization and its founder, Xingyun. Foguangshan is the huge, wealthy Buddhist monastery and lay organization located in Kaohsiung County in southern Taiwan that has branches throughout Taiwan and the world, for example, Xilai University in California. It may be that Foguangshan is the living embodiment of Taixu’s ideals to build a Pure Land on Earth. It provides a rigorous system to train monks and nuns in both Buddhism and modern studies, healthcare and charity services to society, Buddhist courses and retreats for laypersons and various forms of community outreach, Buddhist scholarship like the *Foguang da cidian* as well as publications aimed at the general public, a daily newspaper, daily radio and TV broadcasts, domestic and international monastic ordination ceremonies, and ordinations for *biquiuni* (fully ordained nuns) in Taiwan and throughout Asia.61 The editors of Xingyun’s lectures would agree: “The Venerable Master Taixu was the advocate of a Buddhism for human life, but Xingyun is the one who has put a Buddhism for human life into practice.”62

Critics of Foguangshan’s empire see too much wealth, comfort, and commercialism for a Buddhist temple, however, while others point to his politics. Xingyun consistently supported the KMT throughout the period of martial law, served as a member of the KMT Central Standing Committee, and was a commissioner in the Overseas Chinese Affairs Committee. In addition, Foguangshan has indirectly represented the ROC in visits to mainland China and espouses a “Greater China” worldview, decidedly not for Taiwan independence. Xingyun delimits “political participation” on the part of his followers to individual cultivation of ethical behavior and spiritual purification. He stresses how cultivation of wisdom, morality, virtue, and conscience can cure the ills of modern society and politics, but not through political mobilization or by opposing the political or economic status quo.63 When Laliberté asked why Foguangshan collaborated with structures that have brought about these very ills, he was told that Master Xingyun “had no choice but to collaborate with the authorities for the benefit of Buddhists and the people in general during that period.”64

As we have seen above, Taixu also remained close to the Nationalists throughout his whole life, but did not forbid his followers from participating in politics. He probably also would have been critical of Foguangshan’s mountain-topism (*shantou zhuyi*) and sectarian characteristics: promoting a “Foguangsan Buddhism” based on Master Xingyun’s ideas and expecting loyalty to the Foguangshan collective identity.65 Taiwan scholar Zheng Zhiming also has criticized the tendency of several big popular Buddhist temples to center around a cult of the founder with an overemphasis on the study of his/her teachings, rather than study and meditation upon the Dharma conveyed in the Buddhist *sūtras* themselves.66 Zheng did not name specific associations, but doubtless he meant the “Buddhist mountaintops” of Foguangsan as well as Ciji.
Ciji Buddhist Compassion Relief Association. Ciji, an international NGO with a board of lay trustees, is claimed by some sources to be the largest civil organization in Taiwan. Worldwide membership numbers over four million members and its assets exceed that of many world nations. Founded by the Taiwan nun Zhengyan and staffed by 100 resident nuns, Ciji is primarily a lay Buddhist organization. Its missions include charity and disaster relief, medical care and research (including two hospitals, and the first bone marrow bank in Taiwan), education (from kindergarten to university and a medical school), culture (TV station, videos, magazines), and environmental protection.

Though Zhengyan always refers herself as a disciple of Yinshun, in fact, she did not study with Yinshun or any other master for extensive periods of time. Yinshun did agree to be her tonsure master so that she was eligible to attend the BAROC ordination session in 1963, and he gave her the Dharma name Zhengyan. He also instructed her, “At all times do everything for Buddhism, everything for sentient beings (shishikeke wei fojiao, wei zhongsheng).” Most observers see Ciji as the shining example of actualizing Yinshun’s exhortation to build a Pure Land on earth.

Zhengyan’s belief that poverty is primarily caused by disease, and individual and social suffering have primarily moral and spiritual causes is why Ciji concentrates on providing medical care and charity, and expressly does not advocate political or economic change. Ciji members and employees within the Ciji infrastructure, whether nuns or laypeople, are forbidden to participate in formal politics or socio-political activism. “Fighting for the downtrodden and shouting about justice will make the situations even more complicated and confused…[a] sense of responsibility is more important than a sense of justice.”

Here, Zhengyan is even stricter than Yinshun. “[U]nlke Taixu, Yinshun shuns political activity and emphasizes a return to appropriate religious practice and charitable activity…” Yinshun did not forbid laypeople to participate in political life, but listed “political organizations” in the same forbidden category for monastics as dance halls, red-light districts, bars, etc.

Furthermore, with all their experience and expertise in the areas of healthcare, welfare, and relief, Ciji has not taken part in public or academic debates or lobbied the government. Nor have Ciji members served as legal or policy advisors to government officials, all this in contrast to other NGOs in Taiwan.

Taiwan’s activist nun Ven. Zhaohui wrote on Zhengyan:

1. Ciji promotes a Pollyanna-ish view of the world that Buddhism in fact does not declare (i.e., Ciji’s “love” is not the same as Buddhist compassion);
2. Ciji encourages idol worship because it concentrates on promoting the life and thought of “The Shangren,” [respectful title for Buddhist Master, Zhengyan] and overemphasizes Guanyin, rather than promoting the Dharma as conveyed in Buddhist scriptures themselves;
3. Ciji’s approach to propagating Zhengyan’s Still Thoughts is that this is the truth, which must be obeyed, without critical reflection;
4. Doctors, nurses, all Ciji personnel, all Ciji lay members, etc., are not allowed to participate in politics or political movements. This violates the civil rights of ROC citizens.
5. Charity is but a bandaid that lacks or precludes (a) further internal/spiritual and change or growth, and (b) further structural change, preventive measures.
6. Claiming neutrality may, in fact, at times contribute to social problems and the sum of human suffering.

Elsewhere, Ven. Zhaohui praises Zhengyan for her achievements in welfare, relief, education, and medical services. “But sometimes the cause of human suffering is political. What good is going to be accomplished if we feed the hungry without addressing the causes of their hunger…” Zhaohui continues by pointing out that she has been criticized by some Buddhist organizations for her activist style of engaged Buddhism. Members of Ciji, for example, criticized Zhaohui (a foremost activist for animal rights in Taiwan) for
showing a videotape of a pig slaughterhouse, reasoning it would give bad publicity to pig farmers, thus disrupt the economy, and thus disrupt social harmony in Taiwan. Zhaohui responded:

But I think the harmony this person and others speak of is illusory. From my [Buddhist] perspective eating pork is not only causing the pig to suffer but also humans… Humanistic Buddhism is not just about human society, but all living creatures. I want to address the areas of inequality and injustice that affect all beings.73

...These organizations’ leaders have developed neither a comprehensive perspective on political economy nor a detailed social doctrine.74

However, supporters of Ciji, both within and without the organization, hold that Ciji is, in fact, more radical than critics see, because Ciji calls for a total and holistic reorientation in values on both the individual and social level that eventually will transform society far beyond what schemes for socio-political reform could accomplish.75

**Dharma Drum Mountain.** This organization was founded in 1989 by Master Shengyan, a Chan master who, since he promotes the establishment of a Pure Land on Earth, considers himself a descendant of the reformist lineage of Taixu and Yinshun.76 Other formal links to Taixu include the fact that Shengyan was trained in a Buddhist seminary in China founded by a student of Taixu, and in 1960 was formally tonsured in Taiwan by Dongchu, another student of Taixu. Shengyan writes: “It is because of [Taixu] that modern Buddhism maintains many of its hopes for security and new life…I am not one who espouses or implements in practice Taixu’s particular theories, yet I am one who reveres his spirit.”77

Dharma Drum Mountain is dedicated to creating a Pure Land on earth, using the methods of the basic Buddhist precepts, meditation, and wisdom. It follows a blueprint of protecting the spiritual environment and promoting the spiritual renaissance. First we purify our minds, then we purify our actions and thus purify society.78 Shengyan promotes four kinds of environmentalism:

1. Protect the spiritual environment by using sincerity, compassion, and humility to purify our minds;
2. Protect the natural environment;
3. Protect the living environment by leading a simple, frugal, tidy life; and
4. Protect the social environment through correct decorum in mind, speech, action.

Shengyan encourages his disciples to simplify life rituals like weddings and funerals, and promote wholesome practices and customs. The spiritual renaissance addresses how to: cultivate peace at the levels of self, family, and society; deal with desires; handle problems; help oneself and others; and cultivate blessings. Dharma Drum has invested much money and human talent in academic pursuits (Buddhist studies and universities), public outreach, education through care services (disaster aid, charity, care of the old, sick and dying), and the promotion of “simple and healthy” ceremonies for birthdays, marriages, and funerals.

It must be said that, unlike the Ciji organization, Buddhist studies at Dharma Drum rank at a world-class level and Master Shengyan travels around the world promoting interreligious dialogue as well as international Buddhist academic and cultural exchanges. He has done much to promote Buddhism worldwide; Taixu would be gratified.

In sum, Dharma Drum advocates a process of peaceful evolution, with primary emphasis on individual transformation, towards the goals of harmony and tranquility. There is no socio-political critique, let alone any calls for political activism, opposition to power-holders, or radical restructuring. Again, this is true to the letter of Yinshun, and like Zhengyan, Master Shengyan does not believe true social change will come via political struggle. It is worth noting that Shengyan spent ten years in the Nationalist Army from 1949-59
and served as a delegate to the National Assembly. It does not seem that he was ever inclined to question the political-military status quo, either now or during the time of martial law in Taiwan. While privately he may oppose war, neither he, nor Xingyun or Zhengyan, supported the anti-war movements like the one in Taipei last spring opposing the American war in Iraq.

Shengyan commented last March that he does not support any kind of war but, “...when war is inevitable, I believe that displays of military force which mainly serve to intimidate the enemy and at the same time minimize the destruction of life and property are better relative to other sorts of war.” However, But who or what, exactly, is “the enemy”? What happened to Buddhist non-duality? This is a far cry from Thich Nhat Hanh's injunction not to kill, not to let others kill, and to find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war, the twelfth mindfulness training in Interbeing.

In conclusion, Taiwan’s top three Humanistic Buddhist groups have made striking contributions to the growth of Taiwan’s civil society in the areas of education, free media, welfare provision, charity, and the environmental movement. They have encouraged active participation by laypeople (male and female) and promoted the order of nuns (biquni). Yet, Laliberté points to their overall conservative political position and their acceptance of the neoliberal capitalist economic policies advocated by nearly all political parties on Taiwan. “They do not advocate a ‘third way’ between socialism and liberalism, and they do not articulate the kind of radical views associated with Liberation Theology. They shun principles such as “preferential option for the poor” and are not associated with the trend of engaged Buddhism pushing for democratic consolidation that thrives in South and Southeast Asia.”

However, one could argue for the power of changing consciousness. Ciji and Dharma Drum have been very effective in educating people about basic environmental issues, while Ciji has extended women’s nurturing and healing role from home to society (the “maternal” role is basically the same, though the scope is widened), and influenced the family-oriented Chinese to think beyond family unit to neighborhood, other regions, other countries, and extend care and resources universally. In other words, they promote the evolution of a public consciousness that is crucial for a true civil society. However, Laliberté did not discuss the younger generation of Buddhist activists, as will be seen below.

**Paradigm Shift?**

Taiwan’s environmental movement began in the late 1980s and several major Buddhist groups like Ciji and Dharma Drum Mountain have done good work promoting environmental and ecological consciousness, in contrast to mainstream Buddhist circles who remained detached from any social movement. This is the first shift in the paradigm wheel. Yet, Canteng Jiang points out that they are still inspired by traditional attitudes of husheng, xifu (protect life, lead a frugal life, conserve resources, recycle, all at an individual level) rather than criticizing the source of environmental problems within industry, government policy, capitalism, etc. This kind of approach Jiang and other scholars categorize as biedu (case by case, individual salvation, assuming that the root of social problems is within oneself, not society or environment) as opposed to pudu (universal salvation).

Buddhist leaders in Taiwan have not looked deeply into Buddhist ethics to create a Buddhist ecology, though recently works on ecology by lay scholars and by Yinshun’s disciples have been published and lately Zhengyan refers to “Gaia theory” in her writings. Yinshun’s disciples such as Ven. Chuandao of Miaoxin Temple continue to shift the paradigm wheel and, in Jiang’s phrase, have progressed to the level of pudu, universal salvation, as they now critique the collusion of government and big business. The message of Chuandao’s writings and films is to break the myth of Taiwan’s “economic miracle” and rectify biased government development policies. He urges the passage of a law to end the manufacturing of Styrofoam and plastic, though these are huge enterprises in Taiwan, like the behemoth Formosa Plastics. But these products are triply polluting: the factories themselves, the refuse that wastes space in landfills; and the
pollution that results if refuse is burned, causing harm to humans and the food chain. Chuandao has opposed the construction of a fourth nuclear power plant in Taiwan, as has Zhaohui. Zhaohui founded the “Caring about Life Association” to promote animal protection and animal rights in Taiwan, because she believes that Humanistic Buddhism does not mean just human-centered Buddhism, but is also for the liberation of all sentient beings.

Of the post-Yinshun generation in Taiwan today, only a few monastics, such as the nun Ven. Zhaohui, her student Ven. Xingguang, and the monk Ven. Chuandao, could be placed in the category of “radical activists” in an analysis of engaged Buddhism.

Ven. Zhaohui (b. 1957) founded the Hongshi Buddhist Institute in Taoyuan in 1998, though she has been a Buddhist activist since the late 80s. She is Yinshun’s disciple and main champion, and regards her social activism as the “testing ground” for Humanistic Buddhism’s exhortation to take the bodhisattva’s path. She is a brilliant debater and lecturer, teaches at several universities, has produced many books and articles, has hosted innumerable academic conferences and press conferences, and is also an indefatigable worker for a number of social causes. Her most recent academic work is in Vinaya studies and Buddhist normative ethics with regard to such issues as organ transplantation; surrogate motherhood, abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, suicide, the death penalty, Taiwan’s adultery law, human rights, animal rights, environmental rights, aboriginal rights, and aboriginal ritual hunting practices.

Zhaohui first gained public notice as an advocate for the representation of monastics in the media, especially the previously negative images of nuns in Taiwanese society. When the monks and nuns need an advocate, they can rely upon Zhaohui: “Zhao hui fa shi [Ven. Zhaohui]: these four [Chinese] characters really are effective!”

As far as I know, the only “Buddhist feminists” are Zhaohui and Xingguang. They support efforts by government, education, and NGO circles to work towards gender equality in Taiwan. Zhaohui’s recent book, *Intonation for Thousands of Years: Buddhist Feminist Thought for a New Century*, has one section called “Deconstructing Buddhist Male Chauvinism” and a second section on “Building a Space for Gender Equality in Buddhism.” With their call to “Bid Farewell to Tradition (*Gaobie chuantong*), they have tried to rally Buddhist circles to abolish “the eight special rules” (*attha garudhamma*) which uphold the subordination of nuns to monks, and to end “Buddhist male chauvinism.” Zhaohui has urged the Dalai Lama to restore full ordination for Tibetan nuns as soon as possible. However, contrary to expectations born of the fact that Taiwan’s nuns outnumber monks three to one, nuns have a high social status, are well-educated, and are supported by well-organized temples, this movement has not gained widespread support in Buddhist circles in Taiwan (although Xingyun of Foguangshan supports Zhaohui’s efforts).

Why is Zhaohui a radical activist? Zhaohui feels that Buddhists, according to the Dharma and also as citizens in a democratic society, have the power and duty to speak out and act, to protect the weak and silent, especially animals, and to work for a fair and just society. “A silent people in a democratic society is just like empty air,” she says. Zhaohui and her “Caring about Life Association” have tackled the serious problem of stray dogs in Taiwan’s cities and the abuse of laboratory animals and animals in circuses. One of the fruits of their efforts is the passage of wild animal protection laws and a law to forbidding horse-racing in Taiwan.

In addition, Zhaohui and Xingguang are the only monastics who have voiced opposition to the death penalty, and in the past have assisted those on death row whose sentences are controversial. They also oppose initiatives to build casinos in Taiwan. Zhaohui believes that the Humanistic Buddhism promoted by the three major Buddhist groups in Taiwan has made great achievements in the fields of charity and relief work, education, and culture, but should do more regarding issues of human rights, animal rights, and environmental protection. Charity and relief work are not enough to relieve suffering, much of which arises from flaws in government policies and laws, and from the collusion of money and power. Thus, she believes that in a civil society, non-governmental organizations should play crucial roles as watchdogs, through analysis, advocacy, and lobbying. She says that Buddhists should not sit back, and “cool themselves in the
shade of trees that others planted.” Where were the Buddhists, she wonders, while others took to the streets during the previous decades of social movements in Taiwan?

Now, Taiwan is an open and free society, yet many Buddhists, in the name of harmony and peace of mind, and also fearing harm to the future of their organizations, shun social activism. She says that her stance as a Buddhist regarding politics is inspired by Taixu’s philosophy of wenzheng er bu gan zhi: that Buddhists should be concerned with politics, but not become directly involved in its administration, like forming parties, running for office, etc. Zhaohui works to raise the public’s consciousness and lobbies to change laws, if necessary. More than ever, in Taiwan’s current polarized political environment, where every issue seems to be reduced to a pro-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) or pro-Kuomingtang (KMT) stance, Zhaohui believes that NGOs (including Buddhist ones) should be the “permanent opposition party,” and keep the focus of debate on critical issues common to all citizens. For example, in the past Zhaohui worked together with politicians against building the fourth nuclear power plant, but recently these same people, just to show their displeasure with the DDP, voted for building the nuclear plant. In another example, during the recent presidential elections, she held a press conference to critique some recent pronouncements by Ven. Weijue of the Zhongtai Chan Temple. Ven Weijue had told his followers to vote for the KMT-PFP candidates and to boycott this year’s proposed referendum, claiming that it was illegal. Zhaohui decried these “terrifying people,” saying, “His [Weijue’s] anti-democratic words and deeds humiliate Buddhist circles.”

In sum, a cover story in the Chinese New Taiwan Weekly that featured Zhaohui, with a photo and large headline: “The media despots don’t fear the big officials, they only fear Zhaohui Shi!” “She IS the Taiwan Miracle!” The article continues: “Her martyr spirit is like a nuclear bomb….” Others describe her as having a bodhisattva’s heart plus “eyes filled with righteous anger” (numu jingang). Her closest colleague at the Hongshi Institute, Ven. Xingguang, compares her spirit to the endless surge of the Yangze River. She is part of a very small minority in Taiwan and does not lack critics. Due to her books, lectures, and conferences, she is becoming known in Hong Kong and China, and in the future her publications will no doubt be translated into foreign languages. The Hongshi Institute needs to establish more connections with like-minded engaged Buddhists in Asia and throughout the world.

Conclusion

The Buddhist revival began in a transnational context from the 19th century through the 20th and will continue to evolve in an increasingly connected globe. I have traced the trajectories of Humanistic Buddhism from Taixu to Vietnam and from Taixu to Taiwan, and hoped to show how different sociopolitical contexts in Vietnam and Taiwan resulted in various forms of engaged Buddhism. The Taixu-Vietnam link was unknown outside of Vietnam until recently and works on engaged Buddhism do not mention the connection. Clearly, more comparative work is needed on the history of modern Buddhism.

Whether in China, Vietnam, Taiwan, or other nations in which several phases of a modern Buddhist revival occurred, Buddhism has been undergoing a process of globalization for over a century, with laymen and laywomen playing active roles, performing modern educational and social service functions, utilizing modern forms of communication, embracing modern ideas about institution-building, and attempting to form international and intradisciplinary networks, etc. As Ian Harris notes, “It is difficult to point to any part of the contemporary Buddhist world that has not been massively transformed by at least one aspect of modernity, be it colonialism, industrialization, telecommunications, consumerism, ultra-individualism, or totalitarianism of the left or right…”

The emergence of engaged Buddhism over the past century and its radical activism from the mid-20th century on, is one strand among many in contemporary Buddhism. Scholars debate passionately, as they have for over a century, about the importance of and relationship between contemplation and action in Buddhist thought and history. To cite but one example, during the second wave of Sri Lankan Buddhist revival in the
1940s, the monk Walpola Rahula, proclaimed in his *Heritage of the Bhikkhu* that “monks had a right, indeed a duty, to engage actively in the politics of the island,” that they had a responsibility to work for the public welfare, and that Sri Lankan monks historically had always been engaged until Buddhism’s decline in the era of colonialism. Against Rahula, as heard often in the critique of a socially-engaged Buddhism, detractors insist that the original message of the Buddha was primarily to obtain personal salvation, to transcend the bonds of this world, and, with the bodhisattva’s vow, to help others do the same. These goals, say the critics, are not synonymous with the provision of social services and pursuit of social justice.

Within engaged Buddhist circles there is no consensus about what degree of engagement defines one as an engaged Buddhist. Ken Jones distinguishes between two types of engaged Buddhists: “soft-enders who trust in the ripple effects of one-to-one influence in launching a peaceful society, and the hard-enders who are committed, quietly or militantly, to influence public policy and create new institutions.”

Some insist on a macro approach, like the Buddhist Peace Fellowship’s Think Sangha group, which asserts that, “acting for the benefit of others in this era of globalization cannot be fully realized by simply employing the individual ethical exhortations of the tradition, like being materially generous. The bodhisattva vow means also confronting the structures of greed, ill will and delusion that imprison whole societies and communities in the wheel of suffering.” Likewise, Santikaro Bhikkhu of Think Sangha believes that “socially engaged Buddhism ought to aim to influence the causes of suffering, both in the ego structures operating within individuals and in their parallel structures within society.”

I asked Jonathan Watts whether he thinks that the big Humanistic Buddhism groups in Taiwan are examples of socially engaged Buddhism. He answered that, on the one hand, “they seem to use the Dhamma as an important grounding to their work” (not simply slapping on Buddhist label), yet it is open to debate whether the provision of social welfare activities like hospitals can be called engaged Buddhist practice:

Some say…the distinctive new feature of engaged Buddhism is to challenge the present system with a new paradigm of activities and programs and not merely an activity which cleans up social problems but does not confront their roots [in structural violence]…. A second issue is: Do Taiwanese Buddhist groups undertake social activities “…as part of their missionary work…to eventually convert them in order to build their Dhamma empire? If yes, this would go against the core ecumenical principles of socially engaged Buddhism.

A further question is: Are Taiwan’s Humanistic Buddhist groups overseas branches true examples of “globalization” as engaging in critical dialogue with the Other? Or do they take root primarily among the overseas Chinese? Are they, at some level, simply a one-way extension of institutional influence? Taiwan’s Humanistic Buddhist groups (especially Zhaohui and her activist generation) could well avail themselves of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) founded by Sulak Sivaraksa of Thailand in 1989. High on his list of priorities are human rights, social justice, environmentalism, and a critique of consumerist society. He has been censored and jailed for his activism. INEB is a loose non–hierarchal network comprised of a few “very small marginalized Buddhist NGOs and activists,” though Thich Nhat Hanh and the 14th Dalai Lama are among INEB’s advisors. Groups from Taiwan (Foguangshan, Ciji), Korea, Japan, did not send participants until recently. This was not due to regional (Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia) or doctrinal differences (Theravāda, Mahāyāna), but to the organizational structure of INEB (small, grassroots, marginalized from the government and national Sangha powers). Even the mega-NGO, Sarvodaya, in Sri Lanka did not attend INEB meetings until about four years ago. I also question how the various Buddhist groups (monastic or lay) throughout East and Southeast Asia have access to news and developments in Buddhism throughout the regions? Is there also the problem of language barriers?

Like each of us, Buddhism must face the hopes and dangers of globalization, such as new nationalist and fundamentalist movements, unprecedented interconnectedness due to ease of air travel, instant communications
and access to information via email and Internet, inundation by consumer culture and the banality of violence, growing disparity between rich and poor, and environmental degradation. To meet these challenges, engaged Buddhism must find a workable balance among mindfulness, critical analysis, and risk-taking action.

NOTES

1. My heartfelt thanks to David Loy, Shawn McHale, Santikaro Bhikkhu, Shi Zhaohui, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and Jonathan Watts. I especially thank Thiên Dô who, with great patience and cheer, answered my endless emails and pointed me to vital sources.


5. Ibid., p. 261.


9. Ibid., pp. 182, 192.

10. Though Taixu placed all his eggs in the Nationalists’ basket, one can hardly call the Nationalist regime stable or enlightened during the period 1925-1947, a time of civil war, war against the Japanese, and a time of severe political oppression.

11. Pittman, Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism, pp. 105-14, 118-30, 139-42.

12. Ibid., pp. 142-43.

13. Ibid., pp. 149-50.


15. Thien Do, “The Quest for Enlightenment and Cultural Identity,” p. 260. Throughout Vietnamese history and simultaneous with the urban-based Buddhist revival of the 20th century, there were also popular Buddhist movements at the grassroots level, which at times intersected with urban-elite developments. See Thien Do, Vietnamese Supernaturalism: Views from the Southern Region (London: Rouledge/Curzon, 2003).


26. Ibid., p. 272.


34. Ibid., p. 342.

35. Ibid., p. 346.

36. Ibid., p. 350.

37. Ibid., pp. 352-54.

38. Ibid., pp. 335-36.


41. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, p. 262.


43. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 267-68.


45. Ibid., p. 132.

46. André Laliberté, “Religious Change and Democratization in Postwar Taiwan: Mainstream Buddhist Organizations

47. From Yinshun, *Taihxu dashi quanshu* [Complete Works] 47.431-456


55. Ibid., N5. Lu is quoting from Yinshun, Ibid., pp. 57-63.


57. Ibid., p. 181.

58. Ibid., p. 162.

59. Ibid., pp. 163-5.


64. Ibid., p. 174.


70. Ibid., p. 177.

71. Ibid., pp. 175-76.


75. Ibid., p. 179.

76. Pittman, Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism, pp. 283-84.

77. Ibid., pp. 284-85.


81. I borrow this phrase from an article by Lan Jifu, “Taiwan fojiao sixiangshibang de hou Yinshunxue shidai,” http://www.awker.com/hongshi/special/arts/art6.htm. However he uses the phrase in a different sense than I do here. He discusses what he thinks are the direct heirs to Yinshun and his thought, in the sense of written works, not in terms of praxis or actualization. Lan defines them as the Yinshun Age, 1952-1994, from when the Master came to Taiwan to the year when he ceased writing, due to ill health. Lan Jifu writes that since 1994, his students, such as Zhao Hui, and her colleagues, such as Xingguang and Wuyin at the Hongshi Buddhist Institute (all three are nuns), and the monk Chuandao of Miaoxin Temple, have taken on the task of propagating, developing, actualizing, and answering criticism of Yinshun's work. Also included in this “generation” are monastic and lay scholars who have published criticism of Yinshun's work, either for textual/hermeneutical reasons, or in defense of the Tibetan,Pure Land, and Chan traditions critiqued by Yinshun.

82. There is no monograph about her in English, but in Chinese Tao Wuliu has written Shi Zhaohui fashi (Taipei: National Chinese Library, 1995) and Geoff Foy has a chapter in his “Engaging Religion: An Ethnography of Three Religious Adherents in Taiwan's Academic Culture,” Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2002, Chapter V. For this section of my paper, I have relied upon materials on the Hongshi Institute website: www.hongshi.org.tw.


84. Zhaohui, “Dangdai fojiao de rongjing yu yinyou,” Parts I-III.

85. Gu Meifen, Ibid.


89. See recent works by Thien Do and Shawn McHale, for example.

90. Harris, Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia, p. 19.


100. Ibid.
Volunteer Activities of Korean Buddhist Nuns

Jihong Sunim

Patients and their caregivers tend to feel uneasy and alienated during a stay in the hospital, and may become depressed and worried. Due to the fear of pain and death, the need for religion becomes apparent to patients. That is where the Buddhist chapels of hospitals come in. These Buddhist chapels in hospitals are places to practice the Buddha’s compassion for both patients and their caregivers, by talking with them and sharing their problems and stories. These Buddhist chapels are places where patients are encouraged to have faith in the Buddha, the universal doctor, and to practice his teachings. The Buddhist chapels help patients to recover from their illnesses and guide them toward happiness.

Volunteering Activities of Female Hospital Dharma Teachers

Buddhist medicine is based on the spirit of bodhisattva action that comes from the Buddha’s compassion and the wish to save all beings from suffering. From the medical standpoint of Buddhism, the spirit of the bodhisattva saving all suffering beings in Mahāyāna Buddhism is related to medical treatment. A case in point is the philosophy of Bhaishajyarāja (the Medicine Buddha) that sets out the great goal of eliminating all the diseases of beings.

Medicine is a discipline that deals with human beings. Medical care is aimed at promoting health, vitality and happiness by studying, preventing and treating diseases. Religion has its own territory which is not covered by other disciplines, such as science. It seeks to uncover the truth and help provide solutions to the problems of life.

There has been general consensus that religious activities play a significant role in good health. Little attention has been paid to linking religion and medical treatment, however. The importance of this link has recently been recognized, raising awareness about the need to understand patients’ religious orientation in diagnosing mental disorders. This view is gaining ground because of evidence that religious activities help not only to empower human beings socially and spiritually, but also help prevent and aid in recovery from illnesses.

Then the question arises: can religion cure diseases? In 1966, there was a study of 296 members of the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) on this question. Ninety-nine percent of the respondents said, “Prayer can cure diseases,” and seventy-five percent replied, “Prayer from others can help to treat diseases.” A research team at Columbia University used Medline, an electronic index to the contents of biomedical and health sciences journals, to survey hundreds of papers on the relationship between religion and physical health. They found that a majority of the papers surveyed focused on religions such as Catholicism and the Benedictine order, which emphasize abstaining from unhealthy activities. The research team also learned that papers on Protestant churchgoers suggested that their incidence of disease is below the average. Dr. Suroun, a member of the team, explained these results by saying, “Those with religious leanings tend to lead moderate lives without drinking or smoking and are psychologically stable, thus leading to lower incidences of disease and premature death.”
Doctors should take into account patients’ religious faith in identifying disease preventing factors and the groups in which they can find comfort. The reason is that a variety of studies found that those who frequently attend religious gatherings are both physically and mentally fitter than those who do not. This result clearly demonstrates the benefits of religious life to both physical and mental health. Backing up this point is a recent report by *The Times*, a British daily newspaper. According to a report published on May 25, 2003, the hypothesis that practicing Buddhists lead their lives with a much greater sense of happiness than non-religious people can be scientifically substantiated. The newspaper also said that a research team at the University of Wisconsin medical school scanned the brains of those who practiced Buddhism for several years. The study found that the subjects showed a more active happiness center in their brains than normal people. The happiness center regulates calmness and happiness in the mind. The research team suggested that the result has much to do with Buddhist’s attitude that highly values calmness and contentedness. Professor Flanagan at Duke University said, “The studies like this have enabled us to hypothesize that Buddhists living in places like Dharamsala where the Dalai Lama lives have a happy spirit.”

Ironically, most patients visit the doctor because of a need of healing, and not because of disease: the symptoms that cause patients alarm are usually spectacular demonstrations of the body’s healing mechanisms at work, a process called the inbuilt miracle. Among several natural healing processes, religious practice can be very healing.

**Hospital Dharma Teachers**

The Buddhist term “hospital Dharma teacher” refers to a religious teacher or chaplain who carries out religious work at hospitals. Won Seung, the Korean term for hospital Dharma teachers, is short for Byung Won Saṅgha (literally, the Buddhist community at hospitals). The term refers to those who satisfy the religious needs of patients and their family members, and provide them with psychological help through preventive measures and treatment. They carry out their duties residing in hospitals and helping patients and their families to eliminate greed, anger and foolishness, while practicing morality, mindfulness, and wisdom themselves. From a Buddhist perspective, the role of hospital Dharma teachers will be highly valued only when these teachers fully understand the fundamental philosophy of Buddhism and practice what they have learned.

The purpose of hospital Dharma teachers is to take care of the sick with compassion until they are completely recovered. A discourse of the Buddha even says, “Among the eight fields of blessings, the blessing of nursing is the best.” The Buddha says, “Always ward off misfortunes by taking care of disease. Seeds produce fruit and the fruit gives rise to the seed as all are inter-related. Therefore, good deeds are rewarded with good and evil deeds bring retribution. Bhagevan means father, and the discourse and doctrine of the Buddha means the mother. Those who study together are brothers. This will lead you to reach enlightenment. In the *Brahmajala Sūtra*, the Buddha also says, “Buddhists should always care for the sick as sincerely as they would make offerings to Buddha.”

The virtues that hospital Dharma teachers should have are: (1) strong faith; (2) empathy with the patients’ feelings; (3) a desire to eliminate disease; (4) continuous effort; (5) thoughtfulness, (6) humility; (7) mindfulness and wisdom; and (8) the wisdom of listening. The duties of a hospital Dharma teacher require a teacher to: (1) have both medical expertise and administrative expertise; (2) be emotionally stable; (3) treat patients as one would treat the Buddha; and (4) be sensitive to patients’ cultural values.

There are five virtues that caregivers should have. Caregivers should: (1) be well aware of what patients can eat and what they cannot; (2) not feel uncomfortable with patients’ bodily fluids; (3) not be arrogant or concerned about personal gain; (4) be committed to their patients’ recovery; and (5) make patients happy by sharing the Buddha’s teachings with them.
Staff Composition at Buddhist Chapels
(Roles vary according to individual hospital policies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff member</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monk/nun</td>
<td>Praying for recovery; visiting and counseling patients, caregivers and hospital staff; serving as clinical researchers and members of brain death determination committees; lecturing at medical colleges; organizing religious events; consoling the family members of dying patients; offering prayer on patients’ deathbeds, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Managing books, consoling patients and their families, doing office work, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>Offering prayers once a week for patients in a sickroom, handing out prayers and brochures, making pilgrimages, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>Taking care of financial affairs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteer Activities Carried out by Hospital Dharma Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Volunteer Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Patient         | Visit and counsel patients.  
Let patients know the existence of the Buddhist chapels of hospitals so that they can listen to chanting and counseling from hospital Dharma teachers.  
Provide comfort to visiting patients, caregivers and hospital staff members by treating them to tea.  
Arrange help for needy patients and provide them with access to free medical attention.  
Console the families of the brain dead and counsel them on organ donation.  
Offer chanting on patients’ deathbed. |
| Hospital Staff  | Consult hospital staff on many issues including their practice of faith and ways to defuse conflict with colleagues.  
Celebrate the birthdays of the staff and offer chanting for them.  
Provide solutions to psychological conflicts due to the work in hospital. |

The religious activities offered by the Buddhist chapels of hospitals include: (1) chanting for hospital staff and prayers for patients early in the morning and before surgeries; (2) counseling for caregivers; (3) prayers for dying patients; (4) funeral services (prudence advised); (5) counseling and conflict resolution for hospital staff; (6) providing volunteers and hospital staff with opportunities for pilgrimage; (7) maintaining the hospital Buddhist chapels; (8) issuing a weekly newsletter of the Buddhist chapel; (9) publishing and distributing Buddhist texts; (10) lending books related to Buddhism; and (11) offering tea and Buddhist beads to visitors. The roles of hospital Dharma teachers include: (1) provide counseling on the practice of Buddhism; (2) serve as a member of the medical ethics committee; (3) evaluate policies on clinical research and its ethical problems; (4) lecture on the relationship between medicine and religion at medical colleges; and (5) visit and offer prayers for the recovery of patients in general wards and intensive care units.
The Religious Significance and Values of Buddhist Chapels in Hospitals

Good heath is prerequisite to happiness. The Buddha said that there are four pains in human life -- birth, aging, sickness and death. The biggest suffering among them must be the one resulting from disease. In this regard, suffering can act as a tool for doctors and patients to convey their sincerity to each other. The interaction between doctors and patients is substantive and equivalent to religious dialogue. What makes this interaction possible is the power of religion. This is the clear evidence that religion can provide solutions to what other disciplines including science cannot address. The significance of overcoming human diseases through religion is different than through science. Religion makes human beings free from the pain of disease and contradiction in a different manner. In Buddhism, the ultimate goal of medical treatment is not to eliminate pathogens but to save patients who suffer from disease. In other words, the purpose of treatment in Buddhism is to save human beings. Caring for sick people with faith and compassion is the most important religious salvation. Helping those who badly need religious inspiration requires a concrete and realistic approach, not a transcendental one.

When the Buddha realized the truth, he instructed his disciples to go to local areas to disseminate his teachings and edify living beings. This was aimed at bringing comfort and benefit to all living beings. So the Buddha himself went out to edify living beings in order to free them from suffering. The truth of Buddhism does not lie in self-liberation but in the benefit and the happiness of all. This means that hospital care is not only a merciful tool to reach out to needy people but also a good example of Buddhism’s ultimate goal, or freeing all living beings from suffering. To religious people, hospital care is a means of demonstrating and realizing religious salvation.

The Buddha’s basic idea behind medical treatment is that the root of a disease can be eliminated only when a doctor, a nurse and a patient build mutual trust and are united as one. In this sense, Buddhist texts highlight the ethics of doctors while instructing the duties of patients. The texts also say “Caring for the sick is the highest practice for Buddhist monks or nuns and the merit from it is the most valuable among the eight fields of blessings.” From a religious standpoint, providing services for human beings is equivalent to dedicating oneself to the subject of worship and the realization of the ultimate goal of religion by restoring health to sick people. Eventually, this also opens the door for religious attainment. Since this act is to help the sick and weak, the service is all the more valuable.

Hospitals are the place where life and death are determined on a daily basis. Therefore it is extremely necessary to inspire the hope of being free from disease and so to extend a helping hand to patients in hospitals. Religion has a great role to play in relieving the pain of patients by taking good care of them. In this sense, the role of medical staff and hospital Dharma teachers are significant in helping patients. The Buddhist chapels of hospitals should expand their volunteering activities.
Engaged Buddhism and Community Action

Trina Nahm-Mijo

If our own and others’ welfare were totally unrelated and independent from one another, we could make a case for neglecting others’ welfare. But this is not the case. I am always related to others and heavily dependent upon them, no matter what my level of spiritual development; while I am unenlightened, while I am on the path, and also once I have achieved enlightenment. If we reflect along these lines, the importance of working for the benefit of others becomes naturally apparent.

~ The 14th Dalai Lama

On November 18, 2003, the Ola’a (Hawaiian for “sacred”) Community Center was officially opened. As the President of the Board of this non-profit organization, I made sure that this quote from the Dalai Lama was visibly hanging on the door. This community center, housed in two buildings of an abandoned middle school, was an effort on the part of ordinary citizens to take back their community and to turn their youth away from the scourge of a very deadly drug – crystal methamphetamine, better known as “ice” – which has begun to ruin families and destroy lives in the community where I live on the Big Island of Hawai’i.

The United States’ federal government’s “War on Drugs” program has had a very unfortunate effect on our small isolated, island community on the Big Island. By eradicating marijuana, it has made the much more harmful and highly addictive crystal methamphetamine drug more available and cheaper to its residents, including the youth.

The slippery slope involved in social change work can easily derail any particular individual’s efforts to address a particular problem unless they are grounded in the Buddhist philosophy that we are all interdependent and must recognize the complex web of interrelated causes and conditions. This Buddhist philosophy has helped me to deal with the myriad challenges that accompany efforts to mobilize individuals to work together for the betterment of the whole community. This means that even those that seem unsympathetic to our cause play a crucial role in the evolution of our particular goals and must be recognized for their humanness, rather than any particular behavior or attitude that they may exhibit at any particular time. From a Buddhist perspective, they are connected to us in some way.

The devastating effects of rampant drug use on the island have been a community concern, especially in the last five years or so. It was intensified in 2001, when the terrorist attack in New York negatively affected Hawai’i, an economy highly dependent on the travel industry and tourism. In a social environment where economic and social survival becomes threatened, drug use increases as a means to escape the dismal pressures of everyday living.
Activist Alice Walker, in her book of essays, *Anything We Love Can Be Saved*, describes that a passion for social justice can fuel necessary social change in a world riddled by pessimism, greed, and fear. Our love relationship with the world, and *karunā*, the gift of compassion, can give us the courage to confront our fears and to pursue the change spiritually necessary to survive in a materialistic, *samsāric* world.

In November 2001, a team of professors and their students planned and implemented a “Town Meeting on the Future of the Big Island” at the college campus in an effort to mobilize the community around finding solutions to the Big Island’s most pressing social problems, including the “ice” epidemic. It resulted in a publication outlining Action Plans around 25 focus groups, including several dealing with the drug problem in our community.

In the spring of 2003, as a spin-off of the success of the Town Meeting event, a colleague of mine, Dr. Noelie Rodriguez offered a Community Development course at Hawai‘i Community College. In May 2003, as an offshoot of the Town Meeting and the Town Meeting booklet, a conference called “No Ice in Paradise” was sponsored by the Healing Island Roundtable, one of the subgroups from the Town Meeting. Members from the Mayor’s Office, the Hotel Industry, unions, community members, and college and university faculty members met in Kamuela, located on the northern portion of the island, to discuss solutions to the ice epidemic on the Big Island.

One of the activities of the community development course involved meeting with the Hawai‘i County Mayor, Harry Kim, who expressed his desire to save the historic Ola‘a Middle School in Kea‘au. His desire to save this old building from demolition and the community’s need to establish a site where the pressing problems of the community could be addressed in positive ways gave birth to the Grassroots Community Development Group (GCDG). The goal of this group was to move towards becoming a non-profit and go after funding to create programs for youth-at-risk as well as provide a site where sustainable economic alternatives and family strengthening activities could take place. This was compassionate action at work. GCDG hosted a series of 16 community meetings held in the Kea‘au community from March through June 2003. These meetings were a forum for community members to identify their most serious social problems and the barriers that prevent them from addressing these needs. They were also asked to identify possible solutions.

The top three problems identified were: (1) an increase in meth use and its associated negative behaviors by adults; (2) a concomitant increase in the number of youth-at-risk for meth use and other anti-social behaviors; and (3) dysfunctional families.

The community identified the following barriers to addressing these problems: (1) lack of community resources and support, such as prevention and treatment programs; (2) inadequate school resources and support, such as tutors, counselors, alternative after-school programs and activities; and (3) lack of community resources and support to foster effective parenting skills.

Community members identified possible solutions as: (1) implementing prevention strategies that include education and awareness on drugs and related issues; (2) developing family strengthening programs and activities that promote healthy families; (3) creating opportunities for positive social interaction; (4) creating a Community Center for area youth and families; and (5) providing mentoring/tutoring services for area youth.

Focusing on solution number four, in June 2003, with the help and support of local officials, GCDG opened the doors to the Ola‘a Community Center for All of Puna (OCC). In August 2003, GCDG got a one year lease from Kea‘au Middle School Principal, Jamil Ahmadia, to use 3 large vacated rooms in the old Kea‘au Middle School. Since then, the momentum for the community center has been building and on October 8, 100 people showed up for an Open Meeting to volunteer, suggest directions, sources of funding, and support the creation of the community center.

In October and November, classes in T’ai Chi, Kung Fu, Girl’s Health, Children’s Art, Healing Touch, free tutoring, and a Family Game Night were started. All of these classes and activities were offered free
or at a very small charge. On October 31, a Halloween Dance was held for teenagers, which attracted over 80 youngsters to the center. The official opening occurred on November 18, bringing in approximately 400 participants. All of this was accomplished by volunteers and donations! In the past six months, at least 1,000 persons have attended events, meeting, classes, and open activities at the Center. It is hopeful that out of individual pain and suffering has blossomed a community effort to reclaim a community.

In her book *World As Lover, World As Self*, Joanna Macy says: “It is my experience that the world itself has a role to play in our liberation. Its very pressures, pains, and risks can wake us up – release us from the bonds of ego and guide us home to our vast, true nature. For some of us our love for the world is so passionate that we cannot ask it to wait until we are enlightened.”

Since 9/11, our world has been riddled with the fear of the other, the fear of terrorism, the need to be secure in an insecure, unstable world. It seems in this atmosphere of “terror”, we stand to become imprisoned not by the “other”, but from our own inner paralysis which this environment breeds. In a recent essay, environmental writer Terry Tempest Williams described this dilemma: “How do we engage in responsive citizenship in times of terror? Do we have the imagination to rediscover an authentic patriotism that inspires empathy and reflection over pride and nationalism?” She goes on to say: “We can ask ourselves within the context and specificity of our own lives, how fear can be transformed into courage, silence transformed into honest expression, and spiritual isolation quelled through a sense of community.”

It is the action that springs from compassion that is humanity’s path to inner peace and ethical conduct. This inner fortitude cannot be separated from what one does in one’s professional life, also. Furthermore, according to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, “When compassion is lacking, our activities are in danger of becoming destructive. This is because when we ignore the question of the impact our actions have on others’ well-being, inevitably we end up hurting them.” Thus, in order to do meaningful and ethically based community work, it is important to have internally cultivated the Buddhist principle of “sopa,” patience and inner fortitude. At a higher level of development, “sopa” becomes “composure in adversity . . . reflecting a voluntary acceptance of hardship in pursuit of a higher, spiritual, aim.”

Thus, one’s most difficult challenge in taking on community action efforts may be taming one’s internal “afflictive emotions,” such as anger, hatred, desire of revenge, in other words, developing true internal disarmament. In this way, community development offers a unique way to develop one’s Buddhist practice in everyday life. There will be many opportunities to practice a non-violent response when working with such a vast array of other human beings and to aspire to cultivate “great compassion” and universal responsibility.

**NOTES**

The
Ordination
Issue
The Lord Buddha prescribed a three-fold path of ethics, meditation and wisdom for his followers. The foundation stone of these three is ethics, or how we conduct ourselves in relationship with others. Just as someone wishing to build a house should first make sure that the foundations are deep and solid before constructing the walls and roof, likewise, we need to start with our everyday conduct in order to have a strong and unshakable spiritual life. It is said that the Buddha pondered whether to teach the Four Noble Truths or the laws of cause and effect first. We all know he chose the broader of the two, the Four Noble Truths. But these teachings also included teachings on the causes and effects of our actions. Why? It is by our conduct that we create the causes for our happiness or suffering. And, it is by our conduct that we create the causes to achieve our ultimate goal of liberation and enlightenment.

Nowadays, people are often very confused about their ethical conduct, since the unscrupulous often seem to be successful and admired while the good hearted suffer many obstacles and setbacks. But, of course, this is to take a short-term view of the situation. In the vast tapestry of endless interconnected lives, we are merely examining one or two short skeins and cannot see the whole design. In addition, we do not know the inner mental state of those who outwardly appear so prosperous. Even millionaires undergo psychiatric treatment or commit suicide! We are all the recipients of our own actions or karma, so it can happen that when we are experiencing the results of former positive deeds, our lives seem well rewarded and successful. However, if we respond by committing actions that are negative – actions motivated by greed, aversion, envy, or the underlying selfish ignorance, then we are planting seeds for future suffering and disappointment. On the other hand, if we relate to even our difficulties and suffering with understanding, patience and perseverance – using our problems to empathize with the sadness of others – then we are creating the causes both for future happiness and for present progress on the spiritual path.

So how do we bring our conduct in line with our intention? First, we must tame our unruly minds. The Buddha explained that much of our suffering is caused by the inner conflict of our negative emotions such as greed and anger – our loves and hates. The Buddhist path is concerned with recognizing and skillfully dealing with these unwholesome mental states which cause so much trouble for ourselves and others. That is the focus of the precepts offered by Lord Buddha: to help us to tame our minds. With a tamed mind, we have the tool we need to constrain our unethical conduct and instead act, speak, and think in ways that will bring about our immediate and ultimate goals.

There are many levels of precepts: those for the laywoman and layman, those for the novice nun or monk, and those for the fully ordained nun or monk. These are tools the Buddha has given that help us to develop the tamed mind and bring awareness of our conduct. Over time, by taming our minds in relationship with these precepts through developing our awareness, we can accomplish a life that brings the least harm to ourselves and others.

It is important to understand though that these precepts are not commandments. The wording is not, “Thou shalt not.” Instead it is, “I undertake to observe the rule of training.” We are training ourselves to live
in conformity with the conduct of an enlightened being. It would not occur to such a compassionate and wise person to kill or steal! So, by observing these basic precepts, we are also learning how to create harmony and fearlessness around us and at the same time we are no longer creating negative karma.

Implicit in training is a sense of progression, a path from the gross to increasingly subtle levels of awareness. This is the case for all holders of precepts, whether lay, novice or fully ordained. It is the product of the interdependent nature of the three-fold path of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. Earlier, I called ethics the foundation of the house. Here, you might say that the walls and roof depend on the strength of the foundation, but a foundation alone is not a house. Therefore, if we wish to develop our ethical conduct, we also need to develop our meditation practice and cultivate our wisdom. Each is dependent on the other for further and deeper development.

Monastic precepts, whether for the novice or the fully ordained, are far more numerous than those for the layperson, but are not unrelated. Monastic precepts include the lay precepts. On top of that are additional rules, with many being more detailed variations of the basic precepts. These aid the nun or monk to reach ever more subtle levels of awareness, and thus to live in harmony with others and the environment offering harmlessness and fearlessness to all; to uphold the life of a renunciate, allowing ever more depth to practice, and to offer inspiration to others as holders of the doctrine. When others see a well-controlled and serene nun or monk, their faith naturally arises. On the other hand, an unruly member of the Saṅgha can cause disillusionment or contempt towards the Dharma in those looking on.

Having said this, in light of the goals of the practitioner, it can also fairly be said that many of the monastic rules pertain to the customs and conditions of Magadha of 2600 years ago, and perhaps, are no longer so pertinent today. The Lord Buddha himself suggested just before his parinirvana that the minor rules should be dropped and only the most important rules should be handed on. Unfortunately, Ananda failed to inquire which rules were minor and which were essential, and so the decision was taken at the First Council to keep them all intact. We might wonder what sort of precepts the Buddha would lay down if he was around nowadays. Surely the basic five precepts would remain the same, since the life of non-harm that they engender is an eternal principal and not just conduct suitable for the fifth century BCE. They reflect a sane ethical approach which is beyond time and place. Unlike many of the monastic rules, these five precepts do not deal with matters of diet, dress, or ritual. The latter matters are concerns that are rooted in local customs and attitudes and therefore are both temporary and temporal. But the precepts of living an ethical life that harms neither oneself nor others are valid throughout time and in any locality – whether it is the Gangetic plain of 2000 years ago, or New York City, or Seoul today.

The biggest change that would be made if the Buddha was around today would be in the Vinaya rules for monks and nuns. Many of the rules are simply outdated and tend to undermine the role of the Saṅgha practitioner rather than support it. Some, it could be said, are cultural specific, in the sense that many of today’s societies have very different expectations of good behavior. But, of course, people will never agree on just which rules are redundant and outmoded and which are still applicable for this day and age. So, since the Buddha is not around to set us straight, many practitioners, or even whole traditions, have chosen to observe those Vinaya rules that they feel support one on the spiritual path, and have set aside those rules that, rather than being helpful, have become obsolete in their societies. We should be very grateful that the basic rules of conduct for both ordained and lay followers are so wonderfully supportive in helping us to lead a life of impeccability and spiritual depth. Whatever our position in life, we can develop our ethical conduct for the benefit of ourselves and others. This alone will engender a sense of inner contentment and gradually, as our awareness grows, our conduct will become increasingly refined and pure.
Settling the Debate on Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thailand: Why is it Difficult?

Varaporn Chamsanit

Once during my fieldwork, I accompanied a friend to visit a monk, a retired medical doctor, who is my friend’s distant relative. Our initial conversation went in a cordial manner until the subject changed to my research topic. Upon the monk’s request, I briefly described that I was conducting a research about Buddhist monastic women, or *nak-buad phoo-ying*, in Thailand. “What do you mean by Buddhist monastic women?” the monk asked after a slight pause. Before I could finish my answer, he reacted with a change in tone. “There are no Buddhist monastic women in Thailand; there never were. How can you study about something that does not exist?”

This total negation of the legitimacy and even existence of Buddhist monastic women in Thai society may sound like an extreme case, but the monk is just one of the many who share this view. How this negation has been institutionalized is reflected in Thai law on the Buddhist monastic order where there is no mention of women as *nak-buad*, or ordained persons. Given the arguable impossibility of having fully ordained *bhikkhunī* or female monks in Thai Buddhism, there has been a call for the government to officially recognize *mae chi*, the white-robed nuns who observe the eight or ten precepts, as ordained women. This has been to no avail.

Meanwhile, the recent coming-into-being of Theravāda *bhikkhunī* and *samānerīs* (female novices) on Thai soil has become a matter of public controversy. Experts, clerical and lay, are called upon to express their views on the issue. Polls are conducted to measure the reaction of the public. Numerous books and articles are published to offer arguments of differing opinions. At least two graduate theses have been completed on topics related to *samānerī* and *bhikkhunī* ordination, with a few more expected in the near future. The Senate Sub-committee on Women dedicated more than ten months to inquiring into the matter and preparing its position paper which concluded that *bhikkhunī* ordination should be recognized by law.

Despite the extensive debate, in February 2004 the National Buddhist Bureau issued a letter in reply to the Senate proposal, maintaining that there can never be *bhikkhunī* ordination in Thailand due to the irretrievable loss in the lineage of Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order and thus the absence of a *bhikkhunī* preceptor to preside over such an ordination. The Bureau also affirmed a prohibition, issued by the Buddhist Supreme Patriarch in 1928, against male monks and novices giving ordination to women. Perhaps it is this document that prompted the Prime Minister, in his speech to commemorate the 2004 International Women’s Day, to say that the government was in full support of equal social opportunities for women in all spheres “except for some significant cases in which it is hard for the government to intervene. The government has no idea how to deal with the issue of *bhikkhunī* ordination. We must withdraw from that.”

The absence of legal, and to a lesser extent, social recognition has some repercussions on the lives of monastic women. There have been a number of good discussions on the shortcomings (as well as new
opportunities) for mae-chii. For bhikkhuni and samāneri, their unrecognized status may affect the various aspects of their lives including availability of a proper residences, mobility, educational opportunities in formal Buddhist institutions, and the opportunity to receive the same kinds of government support available to male monastic members. To give an example concerning mobility, a samāneri told me a story about how she, in her saffron monastic robes while waiting to board a train, was approached by a police officer who accused her of impersonating a monk and asked to check her ordination certificate.

Nevertheless, the consequences of the status of monastic women are not my focus here. Instead, this paper will discuss the ongoing debate about bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand. It seems that the attempts to settle different views regarding this issue have not gone very far over the past three years of active public debate. This paper tries to answer the question, “Why is it difficult to find common ground on the issue?” In what follows, I will explore some key arguments on bhikkhuni ordination and the fashion in which they are articulated. I will point out some disparities in the characteristics of the arguments which result in perpetual disagreement. This is not to say that there are no other empirical factors, be they social/cultural, economic, or political, which contribute to these different standpoints. However, examining the characteristics of the arguments is a way in which we can come to an understanding of the rationales behind those empirical factors.

Key Characteristics of the Arguments

The most frequently cited reason for the unfeasibility of bhikkhuni ordination in Thai Theravāda Buddhism relates to the questions of Vinaya, specifically, procedural technicalities of the ordination ceremony. The Bhikkhun Vinaya (monastic rules for female monks) prescribes that for a woman to become a bhikkhuni she must present herself to a quorum of at least five bhikkhunis and receive her ordination from a bhikkhuni preceptor. After the bhikkhunis agree to admit her into their community, they will present her to a quorum of bhikkhus, or male monks, who will give their consent in chanting. This process is sometimes referred to as receiving an ordination from the two Saṅghas (clerical orders, female and male). As this argument goes, the Theravāda bhikkhuni lineage died out in South Asia centuries ago, therefore, there are no bhikkhunis to preside over such an ordination at present. As a result, there can never be an ordination of any new bhikkhuni. As Phra Dhammapitaka (P. Payutto), an authority on the Tipitaka (Buddhist canonical texts) in Thailand, puts it, “The matter is clear and simple. Women today have as much right to be ordained as the women of the Buddha’s time. The predicament, however, lies in the fact that nobody is present now who has the right to give them ordination.”

Over the past few years, however, Thai society has seen a rapid growth in the production, or rediscovery rather, of knowledge of the Tipitaka and Buddhist history which may lend legitimacy to bhikkhuni ordination. In one aspect, this knowledge engages in the discussion of the procedural technicality. It proposes a new interpretation of the ordination procedures, saying that before the establishment of the female monastic order, the Buddha initially allowed male monks to give bhikkhuni ordination to women. Since there is no stipulation in the Tipitaka that lifts this very permission of the Buddha’s, the permission still holds. This means that in the absence of the bhikkhuni order, the bhikkhu order of male monks can carry out an ordination ceremony for women.

The essence of these arguments is not so much about which proposition is accurate, for each side of the argument represents a certain degree of textual interpretation. At the core of these conflicting views, however, are the differing attitudes and approaches ones hold towards the text. At one end of this discrepancy is the view that the letter of the Vinaya, the set of monastic codes of conduct that forms part of the Tipitaka, takes precedence over all other concerns. In this notion, the text takes the position of the sacred. It is taken as static, set in the historical period when the Theravāda tradition took shape. In this approach, the text is also taken as isolated from the ephemeral social contexts, both at the time of its conception and in the present
day. One can only study and carry out one’s practice according to the rules, but never review, reinterpret, or amend.

The teachings of the Buddha, Dhamma-Vinaya or Buddhism as we call them, must remain the same. Those who would like to study them may do so. Those who would like to put them into practice may do so. But we do not have the duty or the right to amend them.7

Seen in this light, the monastic codes of conduct are given the same weight and regarded as one and the same as the Dhamma or the Buddhist doctrines or even Buddhism as a whole. This conflation between monastic codes of conduct and Buddhism as a whole can be reconsidered in view of the Buddhist conceptual distinction between lokuttara (above the world) and lokiya (within this world) as will be discussed below. Nevertheless, this one-directional relationship with the Vinaya text is not limited to the laity only. As Phra Dhammapitaka states, “For the Saṅgha, especially Maha Thera Samakhom (the Saṅgha Council), when it comes to the Vinaya, they can only educate [people about the text] and follow the rules. We cannot expect the Saṅgha to act as the Buddha [in amending the texts].”8

Moreover, the act of holding on to the letter of the text itself forms a crucial part of the identity of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand. As a monk affirms, “We cannot erase the Vinaya. If the Theravāda tradition erases the Vinaya, that’s the end. We will be Theravāda no more. We are Theravāda because we take the Vinaya strictly.”9 But this strict devotion to the letter of the Vinaya does not necessarily extend to strict practice by monks in general. This contradiction is witnessed by frequent reports and criticisms of misdeeds among Buddhist monastic members in the media and public discussions, and by the fact that the Buddhist administrative body, Maha Thera Samakhom, has achieved very little to rectify these misbehaviors.

The other approach to the Vinaya views the text in a pragmatic light. The Vinaya is taken as the code of conduct necessary to maintain the harmonious and peaceful life of members of the monastic community. Equally important is the role of the Vinaya in facilitating the utmost Dhamma practice among monastic members. In other words, the text is a tool to achieve an enlightened livelihood.10 According to this view, the Vinaya is highly regarded for its “clarity, thoroughness, and careful order that it enables ordinary monks to have an opportunity to live in the clerical community and learn to be well-advanced in the Dhamma.”11 The Vinaya “covers the livelihood or external life of monks in all aspects in order to facilitate monks’ advancement in their study and their propagation of the Dhamma.”12 Embedded in this argument is a call for careful contemplation of the overall intent of the Buddha in setting the Vinaya rules. It is the intention behind the rules, and not the letter of the rules, that should take precedence.13

In this demystified view towards the Vinaya, changing social contexts are put into consideration, and a discussion of re-reading, re-classification, and reinterpretation of the text is possible. Dhammananda Bhikkhuni, for instance, proposes a reclassification of the Tipitaka, based on the Buddhist concept of lokuttara (above the world or unworldly) and lokiya (within the world or worldly). The lokuttara teachings which deal with the mind, mental formation, and enlightenment are “free from gender bindings,” whereby the lokiya part of the text, such as the codes of conduct which provide guidelines for living in this physical world, “carries heavily social norm and social values of certain space and time.”14

Following this approach, Pramual Phengchan and Phra Phaisan Wisalo, on different occasions, proposed that any discussion of the bhikkhuni issue should not start with the Vinaya question. Instead, one should start by asking: Should there be or should there not be the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Thailand.15 To answer this question, Phra Phaisan says, one must give a priority to possible contributions of the female monastic order towards Buddhism and Thai society. Personal bias should be set aside. Should one come up with a positive answer, the next step is to consider whether the letter of the Vinaya can be interpreted to facilitate the founding of the female order. And it is the monastic order, i.e. the Maha Thera Samakhom, which should take the leading role in this matter.16
The Theravāda-Mahāyāna Division

Another aspect of the body of knowledge that supports the bhikkhuni legitimacy draws on the history of Buddhism to argue against the use of Theravāda–Mahāyāna division as a reason to invalidate the bhikkhuni ordination. As much as the procedural correctness of the ordination ceremony is a prime concern for people who do not agree with the establishment of a bhikkhuni order in Thailand, an aspiration to uphold the “purity” of the Thai Theravāda tradition is also their indispensable agenda. A strong attempt to safeguard this purity is reflected in a proposal shared by several religious authorities, which suggests that women who wish to become bhikkhunis could easily seek their ordination in the Mahāyāna tradition, often known in Thailand as Chinese Buddhism. This, they suggest, would eradicate all problems for all parties concerned. It should be noted, however, that Mahāyāna bhikkhunis in Thailand, still having to seek their ordination abroad, do not enjoy any more recognition under Thai law than their Theravāda sisters. The Chinese and the Vietnamese monastic orders in Thailand, the only two “other” Buddhist monastic orders recognized under Thai law, opt to follow the Thai tradition of not granting full ordination to women within their orders. Urging Thai women to seek their ordination in “other” traditions, a Buddhist educator writes in a passionate tone:

[For women seeking ordination in other traditions,] you must demonstrate your honesty by telling people the truth that you are bhikkhunis of other traditions, and that you are not bhikkhunis of the Thai Saṅgha. Neither are you bhikkhunis as prescribed in the Theravāda Tipitaka.17

Being Thai and being Theravāda seem intertwined here. This is not surprising given the much-discussed history of the close reciprocal relationship between the Thai Saṅgha and Thai state, and between Buddhism and Thai national identity.18 In this structure of relationship, the state offers patronage to the Saṅgha, now in the form of annual budgets and so on. At the same time, the state seeks to control the Saṅgha by legal means. Certain monastic activities such as appointment of preceptors, and temple construction must be authorized by the state. The Saṅgha, as the upholder of the Dhamma, stands as a powerful national symbol for Thai state. In effect, the close identification between the (male) Saṅgha and Thai Theravāda Buddhism, together with the proposal that women seek their ordination in other Buddhist traditions, creates a parallel identification of the prospective female Saṅgha with the “non-Thai Theravāda Other.”

This denial of the possibility of a Theravāda Bhikkhu Saṅgha in Thailand, based on a rigid demarcation between Theravāda and other Buddhist traditions, and between Thai and non-Thai Buddhism, has been challenged in many ways. First, the claim of the purity and originality of the Theravāda tradition has been challenged by a simple historical fact that at the time of the Buddha, no different Buddhist traditions existed. The Theravāda–Mahāyāna schism is a later development in the history of Buddhism, starting a couple of centuries after the Buddha’s death. Consequently, there is no statement in the monastic rules for bhikkhuni ordination, believed to be stipulated by the Buddha himself, which prevents against cross-tradition ordination. As a Thai Buddhist scholar contends,

Neither Theravāda nor Mahāyāna school existed during the Buddha’s time. The term “Bhikkhuni Saṅgha,” coined at that time, simply means “Bhikkhuni Saṅgha.” [The Vinaya] does not specify if it is the Theravāda or Mahāyāna Bhikkhuni Saṅgha.19

Therefore, if one is to go by the letter of the Vinaya, there should be no division between Theravāda and Mahāyāna in the process of bhikkhuni ordination. Both Sri Lankan bhikkhunis having received their ordination from the Taiwanese Saṅgha, and the Thai bhikkhuni having received her ordination from the Sri
Lankan Saṅgha, must be considered “bhikkhunis proper” no matter to which Buddhist tradition one says they belong. The scholar monk, Phra Phaisan, in his new book, argues,

Dhammananda Samāneri, who received her ordination from the two sanghas [male and female] in Sri Lanka, has been a Buddhist samāneri. …The claim that the [Sri Lankan] Bhikkhunī Saṅgha that gave her ordination had received their ordinations from Taiwanese Mahāyāna bhikkhunī preceptors may not in the least obliterate the ordained status of the samāneri in question. …Now that this samāneri has received her bhikkhuni ordination, the same question remains as to whether or not Thai society will accept her as a Theravāda bhikkhuni. That one should completely deny her the status of a Buddhist bhikkhuni is not possible.20

The question posed by Phra Phaisan brings into view the juxtaposition between Thai Buddhism and universal Buddhism. In another argument, a Buddhist scholar also introduces two interesting dichotomies: one between Buddhist principles and traditional norms, and the other between universal Buddhism and Thai Buddhism.

That one does not accept [bhikkhuni ordination] is based neither on academic nor Buddhist principles. It is a matter of personal bias and one’s identification with traditional norms…. Buddhism as practiced in Thailand is not a universal Buddhism. Our Saṅgha was founded based on Thai traditional norms and culture, and is under Thai law and so on.21

In addition to these dichotomies, the taken-for-granted traditionalist characteristic of Thai Buddhism is put under scrutiny in a “deconstruction” project initiated by Bhikkhunī Dhammananda, who herself received an ordination from the Theravāda Saṅgha of Sri Lanka. In the past few years, Ven. Dhammananda, a former professor of Buddhist philosophy, has propagated the need to deconstruct traditional biases against women mistaken as Buddhist beliefs in Thai society, and to rediscover the genuine principles of Buddhism which is said to be free of gender bias.

For the deconstruction theory, we do not need to re-construct anything new in Buddhism because the original is beautiful as it is. We only need to deconstruct false beliefs that have developed later on under the influences of folk beliefs, Brahmanistic values interpolated into the Tipitaka, deep-rooted patriarchal thoughts in our society, ignorance, and adopted traditional practices. …It is the duty of us, Buddhists who uphold our respect for the Buddha and understand the true beauty of Buddhism, to pull down these false beliefs.”22

This assertion of the original Buddhist principles free of gender bias is well supported by others social critics. The idea is sometimes expressed as a return to the genuine intent of the Buddha. Renowned social critic, Sor Sivarak, declares that the Buddha’s permission for both men and women to be ordained has been destroyed by a historical process.23 Pramual insists that some limitations imposed on the female monastic order which exist in the Vinaya result from the strong influence of Brahmanism, therefore not the genuine intent of the Buddha.24

Returning to the Theravāda issue, Phra Phaisan suggests that the Thai Theravāda Saṅgha open its door to bhikkhunis or integrate new forms of monastic women as part of Theravāda Buddhism. Otherwise, he says, the Bhikkhuni Saṅgha will take shape outside the Theravāda tradition, or become part of other established traditions. This means that the Buddhists who are followers of bhikkhunis will be carried along and away from the Theravāda tradition as well.25
Buddhism, Thai Identity and the Good Society

Of all the arguments discussed so far, both that which support and do not support the feasibility of bhikkhunī ordination, one thing becomes quite clear. At the backdrop of these arguments is the intertwined relationship between Theravāda orthodoxy, Thai traditional norms and identity, Thai Saṅgha and Thai state. Yoneo Ishii and Peter Jackson in their separate studies of the reciprocal relationship between Buddhism and the state/monarchy in Thailand, argue that a threat to any entity in this structure of relationship is necessarily perceived as a challenge to its whole.26 Taking this argument a step further, we can now see the issue of bhikkhunī ordination in perspective with the larger social, cultural and political contexts of the country. Whether one wants it or not, bhikkhunī ordination can hardly be viewed by the Thai Buddhist institution as merely a quest by women for a religious life par excellence. Due to the intertwined relationship between the several “Thai” entities mentioned above together with the parochial characteristic of Thai Buddhism, bhikkhunī ordination tends to be perceived as part of a larger phenomenon that will possibly affect change to the seemingly already well-ordered structure of relationship. The perception of bhikkhunī ordination as something larger than itself has led to the concern that this phenomenon will bring about disruption and disunity in Thai society. This worrisome thought is expressed in an article opposing bhikkhunī ordination.

It is clear that the contemporary [call for] bhikkhunī ordination is problematic. It has created a problem to the society. Clearly, it has brought about conflicts of opinions from the start. What more conflicts are we to expect if the ordination actually takes place? This is beyond our expectation.27

This argument arises from a very specific mindset about what makes a good society. Obviously, a good society, in this notion, is one in which the status quo is kept in good and stable order, and any new proposal which may create change to this order is considered a “problem.” Likewise, difference in opinions is considered as “conflicts.” Ishii, in his discussion of Thai nationalism and Buddhism, says that “unity of the state” plays an important role in the kind of nationalism as practiced in Thailand.28 In this light, it is expected that an attempt to establish a Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Thailand will be considered a possible disruption to the so-called social unity, in other words a “conflict” and therefore a “problem to the society” as argued above.

However, this concept of a good society in relation to the bhikkhunī issue has been challenged. Whereas the arguments going on in the political sphere, for example, the parliament, are loaded with terms characteristic of modern political discourse, such as religious freedom, gender equality, women’s participation, constitutional rights, and equal opportunities, there are also attempts to revisit and draw on the Buddhist ideal social structure as stipulated by the Buddha as the basis of an argument. This concept of a Buddhist social structure, which lends support to the idea of equality between women and men, is widely known among Buddhists in general as “the four companies” or four groups of people that form a Buddhist society. These companies are: bhikkhu (male monks), bhikkhunī (female monks), upāpaka (laymen), and upāsika (laywomen). The Buddha is known to have entrusted the responsibility to uphold the Dhamma to these four groups of people. He is also known to have made a statement that the Dhamma is likely to diminish if the four companies do not respect one another. Taking up this ideal social composition, Pramual says, “The Buddha intends for a Buddhist society in which women and men are on equal footings.… We now understand this principle in terms of women’s rights. But actually, this has always been a principle in Buddhism…. By allowing women to be ordained as bhikkhunī, we are confirming our Buddhist belief which has been there from the past.”29 He insisted that the bhikkhunī issue should not be understood as a struggle for the benefit of individual women, but a struggle to resume the decent social structure according to the Buddhist principles whereby “gender will not be used as a justification to cut off opportunities or rights of others.” The discussion on gender equality in Buddhism is an extensive topic in itself. Here, I only
draw on ideas arising in the arguments on bhikkhuni ordination to demonstrate different perspectives of what makes a good society based on gender relation.

**Conclusion: Bhikkhunī Ordination in Perspective**

By means of conclusion, I share a sense of suspicion with a Thai scholar, Nithi Iewsriwong, who poses an important question about the complicated structure behind the obstacles to bhikkhunī ordination in Thailand:

"There must be some kind of complexity that leads to this strong opposition against bhikkhunī in Thailand. This is probably something beyond the Vinaya. ... The explanation that Thai society is a patriarchal society is partly true. But this alone is not an adequate explanation of the complexity. ... The acceptance of bhikkhunī may cast an impact on some kind of structure or lead to some conflict of interest."

In this paper, I try to explain part of the complexity as reflected in some key arguments on bhikkhuni ordination. Quite clearly, knowledge seems to be a vital issue at first. A large part of the debate concerns knowledge of Buddhist texts, teachings and history. From the onset of the controversy, there has been thriving enthusiasm among people concerned to rediscover knowledge about women in Buddhism, particularly bhikkhunis, whose stories, teachings and codes of conduct have been largely ignored in popular as well as institutionalized Buddhist education in Thailand. An impressive body of knowledge has been developed and disseminated within the past few years, thanks largely to the attempts of Ven. Dhammananda, the inquiry of the Senate Sub-committee on Women, and other Buddhist scholars including monks.

After all these attempts, attitudes to and understanding of the bhikkhunī issue have taken a positive turn, with more knowledge and acceptance of monastic women within certain sectors of the society. Nevertheless, the formal/institutional sector seems the hardest to change. This is despite attempts initiated within its own systems, for example a motion raised by the Senate and the work of some Buddhist scholars and monks. With this sector, the discrepancies go beyond different sets of knowledge or the quality of monastic practice of the prospective Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. As discussed above, disparities also lie in different attitudes and approaches ones take towards the Buddhist texts, to what ones see as comprising real Buddhist identity, and to what ones hold as the essence of Buddhism. These attitudes and approaches are not stand-alone entities. They are set in social status and the complicated structure of relationship among different social sectors/institutions. They are also shaped by values such as those concerning gender relation and the quality of a decent society. The discussion in this paper is by no means exhaustive. But it perhaps provides part of the answer to the question as to why it is difficult to settle the bhikkhunī issue in Thailand.

**NOTES**

1. In Thailand, from February 2001 up to the time of this writing, there have been one bhikkhuni and six samānerīs ordained by Theravāda preceptors, either in Sri Lanka or Thailand.

2. Letter from Thailand’s National Buddhist Bureau to the Secretary of the Prime Minister, 25 February 2004.


7. Thongyoi Saengsinchai, “*Panha rueng bhiksuni* (The Bhikkhuni Problem)” in *Khai prissana panha bhiksuni* (Solving the Bhikkhuni Puzzles) (Bangkok: Parientham Samakhom, 2001), p. 44.


9. A high-ranking monk, presenting his view at one of the inquiry sessions of the Senate Sub-committee on Women, held between May–November 2002.


19. A well-known Buddhist scholar, presenting his view at one of the inquiry sessions of the Senate Sub-committee on Women, held between May–November 2002.


Bhikṣuṇī Ordination

This article addresses three topics: (1) Why do fully ordained nuns have more rules than fully ordained monks? (2) Are the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī vows different by nature or just different expressions? (3) Sakyadhita and its role to spread bhikṣuṇīs ordination worldwide (successes and hindrances).

Why Bhikṣuṇīs Have More Rules Than Bhikṣus

The “infractions that have to be avoided” by monks and nuns are mentioned in the Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtras. In the West, we often simply refer to them as “rules that need to be kept.” Three of six traditions, which can be proved to have transmitted their own versions of the Vinaya are still extant: (1) the Sthavira school (in Pāli: Theravāda); (2) the Tibetan tradition (Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda); and (3) the Chinese Dharmagupta, which is also practiced in Korea and Vietnam. According to all three versions, bhikṣuṇīs have about 100 more rules than bhikṣus. In the Tibetan tradition it is said that monks have 253 rules and nuns, 364. In the Theravāda tradition monks have 227 and nuns 311 rules. In the Dharmagupta tradition monks have 250 and nuns 348 rules. There are seven categories of rules. Among them, five rules are of particular concern, due to their gravity. That is why this article follows a slightly different order here than is found in the Vinaya. It compares the number of rules in categories 1-5 and shows how the followers of the three traditions count the total number of rules.

Why do nuns have so many more rules than monks? It is said that the nuns’ order, which was founded five or six years after the monks’ order, had to follow the same rules which had already been made for the monks. Slowly more rules were added, especially gender-specific rules and rules that regulate the relations between monks and nuns. For example, some nuns met their ex-husbands who had become monks and fell back into their old housewife habits. They washed their laundry, brought them food from their almsround, fanned them when it got hot, etc. All these services where forbidden by Lord Buddha. In this way, more rules emerged. Further rules were enacted regarding personal hygiene, apparently a special important topic for women. There are rules on hair cutting and shaving and how to take a bath properly. For example, a nun needs to be dressed when bathing in public waters, she should not exhibit her hips when dressing, should not use makeup, etc.

There were twice as many foolish nuns as foolish monks and they committed all sorts of wrongdoings. In the Vinaya Vibhaga, a kind of commentary on the Prātimokṣa Sūtra, background stories are given to each rule that was set forth. Usually the rules resulted from the wrong behavior of certain foolish monks and nuns. And since twelve fools make more mistakes than six, more rules came about for nuns than for monks. This is one traditional explanation.

In 1991, Ute Hüsken wrote an MA thesis at the University of Göttingen that was a comparative analysis of the pārājika, sanghāvaśeṣa, and nissaggiya pācittiya rules of the Buddhist order of nuns. She compared
the first three categories of rules. She did not examine the gender-specific rules, because rules that stipulate differences of gender are self-evident and do not need to be explained. To determine whether nuns are discriminated against, the rules that are not gender specific need to be considered. Hüsken concluded that, generally speaking, the stipulations concerning the behavior of nuns are punished more harshly than the corresponding stipulations for monks. Overall, there are more restrictions for nuns. The stipulations about sexual misbehavior and keeping too close company with ordained people of the same gender are judged differently for monks and nuns. Buddhist nuns not only have more rules than monks, but a violation of the rules is also often weighted in a more serious category than when the same violation is committed by a monk. Also nuns can be expelled faster from the order or suspended faster from certain privileges in the order.

**Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Vows are of One Entity and Different in Wording**

One could also argue differently and claim: Since nuns keep more rules, they are more privileged. In Buddhism this principle counts: the more rules one keeps, the more good karma, or religious merit, is collected. Besides, the more rules, the higher the level of vows. Consequently the bhikṣuṇī vow must be higher than that of monks, since they keep more rules. They collect more merits and thus are a larger field of merit than their monk-brothers. Because of keeping more rules they attain liberation more quickly. If this were correct, Lord Buddha would have discriminated against men. Some say that women have more attachment and therefore needed stronger medicine than men. If this were correct, Lord Buddha would have discriminated against women. We can probably reject both possibilities.

Tibetan Vinaya experts accept that bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī vows are of one nature (ekabhāva; ngo bo geig), that there is no difference in their entity. Only conceptually or in their wording are they regarded as different. In this context, the problem of change of gender is discussed in the Vinaya literature, the so-called gender transformation (parivṛttiavaṇijana; mtsan ’gyur ba). Evidence is given by Diana Y. Paul in her book, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahāyāna Tradition*. Of course, in ancient times gender transformation did not happen due to hormones or surgery, but naturally, a phenomenon that seems to be known in medicine. Supposing somebody suddenly changes gender, a monk becomes a woman or the other way round, a nun becomes a man, does the person concerned need to be reordained, or is the original ordination still valid? To which order does he or she henceforth belong? Such questions were asked of the Enlightened One. Accordingly, he decided that reordination is not necessary. The vow changes with the body. Henceforth one belongs to the opposite order and accordingly needs to keep more or fewer rules, like everybody else in the same order.

Why then, at least nowadays, do we still not have equal rights for the monks’ and nuns’ order? Particularly against the background of the International Human Rights Charter as well as the Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, nobody will seriously argue that women are of less value than men or have taken a lower birth owing to poorer karma. For sure, we find similar statements in the canons of sacred scriptures of all world religions and we need to understand these scriptures against the social and cultural background of the respective countries in ancient times. Today’s interpretation is decisive. We need to take hundreds of years of exegesis into consideration, as well as the context, and the several “textual layers” which have grown up over the centuries. Contradictory parts in the texts need to be pointed out and discussed.

One common reason given to explain why the vow of the bhikṣus vow is considered “higher” than that of the bhikṣuṇīs is that the monks’ order in general is older than the nuns’ order. This sounds reasonable when thinking about the rule to respect elders according to seniority within one’s own Saṅgha, because of the length of service that has been contributed. If a layman or a novice monk (śrāmaera; dge tshul pa) is allowed to bow towards a bhikṣuṇī, one can suppose that Lord Buddha just tried to go by a general concept and social
and did not discriminate against women. In 1977, the German lawyer Dr. Hellmuth Hecker compiled an essay on the general legal principles in the constitution of the Buddhist order (Vinaya). In a short treatise on hierarchy, he came to the conclusion that seniority [towards monks] applied only within the monks’ order and not in relation to people who were not ordained (laypeople, pilgrims, and novices) or nuns (CV X, 3).

Hecker is referring to section 3 in the Cullavagga X, where Lord Buddha rejects the proposal that monks and nuns should show mutual respect according to seniority, because it was not in agreement with social customs at that time. The Awakened One decided that the monks’ and nuns’ order should organize themselves separately and have increasingly less contact. There is not one Saṅgha of monks and nuns, but two Saṅghas, two different legal corporations. Therefore it is no schism in the Saṅgha if nuns assert equal rights.

At first, in certain matters the monks’ order had a kind of protective function with regard to the nuns’ order, since nuns where not yet used to an independent way of life. But this was more than 2500 years ago. Possibly owing to the prescribed distance, monks were not really able to protect the nuns’ order in all countries. Otherwise, how could it disappear or not come into existence? It is a clear sign that nuns need to take care themselves. If women want full ordination, they cannot expect monks to arrange it for them. They have to take initiative from their own side, and bear responsibility on their own. They have to stand up for their rights or just do it – go and take ordination. It is primarily a personal decision.

Sakyadhita and its Role to Spread the Bhikṣuṇī Ordination Worldwide: Successes and Hindrances

It is thanks to Sakyadhita that the question of bhikṣuṇī ordination has become an international topic that is discussed not only among ourselves, but also in scientific and political circles. In the Theravāda and Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions, bhikṣuṇī ordination is not available today. But since it has survived in countries like Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea, it can be adopted quite easily. For sure, there are still some objections or a certain kind of reserve. Many Tibetan śrāmanerikās, for example, are worried that they might stand out in an unpleasant way or doubt that they can keep more rules than monks. Some monks see the purity of their tradition endangered. It is like being afraid to get involved with something unknown. In addition, there is some skepticism with regard to the authenticity or validity of the foreign tradition, especially with regard to an unbroken lineage. There is also a lack of difficulty of communications, due to language problems, an unfamiliarity with each other’s specific Buddhist terminology and definitions, and a lack of general education.

One of the main goals of Sakyadhita is to help establish the bhikṣuṇī order where it does not currently exist. Since the 1970s several Western women, and even more Asian women, have gone to Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan to take full ordination. Especially in Sri Lanka, great success has been achieved. Sakyadhita conferences in various countries have given women the social acknowledgment and support which they desperately need. In the future, it could be Sakyadhita’s role to keep an eye on keeping high standards for transmitting Buddhism to the West, taking into consideration women’s needs and rights, especially with regard to proper bhikṣuṇī ordination. The necessary requirements for a bhikṣuṇī ordination according to the three living Vinaya versions are similar (see Table 3). A group of ten bhikṣus and ten or twelve bhikṣuṇīs are needed. Bhikṣus must have been ordained for at least ten years, bhikṣuṇīs for twelve years. According to the Tibetan Vinaya, the rite is mainly conducted by a bhikṣuṇī, the abbess (upādhyāyikā; mkhan mo).

Apart from the fact that Mahāprajāpāti was ordained by Lord Buddha himself, the first 500 women of the Śākya clan were ordained by monks. According to I. B. Horner’s translation, the Enlightened One said: “I allow, monks, nuns to be ordained by monks.” This statement set a precedent, showing that ordination by an order of monks is possible in principle. Against the philosophical background that the vows of fully
ordained monks and nuns are identical by nature, this makes sense. Only the body is different. Important for the validity of an ordination is the exact observation of the rite. It is up to the Sangha to decide whether it has been followed correctly. They have the freedom to change the rite, if needed. For example, even today there are nuns who have been ordained by monks. I myself was ordained by the order of monks only in Taiwan in 1985, although many qualified bhikṣuṇīs were present taking care of us, leading the first posadha ceremony after ordination, etc. Similarly, an ordination was performed by Korean monks in Sarnath, India, in 1996.

This shows that for hundreds of years monks of the Theravāda or Tibetan tradition could have granted full ordination to nuns, if they had wanted to do so. History gives evidence that such attempts were made, but were prohibited. Now the trend is towards performing a double ordination with the help of bhikṣuṇīs from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Vietnam living in exile in the various countries. The ordination in Bodhgaya in 1998 was conducted by a mixed group of Chinese, Theravādin, Korean, and Tibetan monks and Chinese, Korean, and American nuns. The ordination in Sri Lanka in 1999 was performed by Sinhalese bhikkhunis and Theravāda bhikkhus. In this case, we have to question which tradition the new nuns follow after ordination. If the rite is conducted by an abbess, one should assume that the new nuns will belong to the same tradition as the abbess does, regardless of which tradition the involved monks belong to.

This gives rise to a number of questions. For example, how different is the vow of a Korean bhikṣu and a Theravāda bhikkhu? Do their vows differ in nature or do they just keep a different numbers of rules for conventional reasons and because they follow a different version of historically variant Vinaya traditions? This could be decisive, depending on which Vinaya version the ordination rite has been performed. In history it has already happened that in secluded areas monks of a certain tradition have asked monks of another tradition to help them with bhikṣu ordination, since their numbers were not sufficient. These ordinations were considered valid. From the historical or genealogical point of view, every vow has its specific lineage. Finally all of them date from Lord Buddha. Sakyadhita could organize Vinaya symposia to find satisfactory answers to these questions, although from a Dharma point of view, such formal questions are not highly important.

In the Tibetan tradition, motivation is considered to be most important factor. Before and during taking a prātimokṣa vow, one should develop the mind of renunciation, i.e., the determination of having gone out or forth for liberation (niryāta; nges par 'byung ba). There should be no restriction with regard to time, place, etc., when taking ordination. If the ordination rite has been followed properly and the exact time of ordination has been announced to the candidate, the ordination has been completed and is valid. If mistakes have been made, those in charge can be blamed.

In the long term, we should also discuss whether it is not time for nuns to perform the ordination by themselves, without the help of the monks’ order. More than 2500 years should be time enough to have learned how to do it. We should also discuss the modern presentation of the two Sanghas during joint Buddhist events. It is quite embarrassing if nun teachers are expected to line up behind novice monks. In the West, it is polite for men to allow women to enter a room first, holding the door open for them. Nuns and monks should at least enter through separate doors, or, if the entrance is large enough, simultaneously in two lines. Within the room or hall they should keep distance, but both line up in front on two separate sides of the room, as is already practiced in many places. If such general politeness is not sufficiently taken into consideration, nuns’ leaders should discuss the matter with monks’ leaders beforehand or else stay away from joint events. For example, it seemed to me quite awkward that, during the triple-platform ordination I attended, the nuns where asked to serve food to the monks. For sure, it was a good opportunity for me to train in the practice of patience, but should not monks get an equally good chance to serve?

Western Buddhists bear the responsibility for transmitting various Buddhist traditions to the West, so that they are complete, comprehensive and authentic. They must also make sure not to import outdated foreign cultural or social customs, feudal structures, or habits in which women are discriminated against.
Sakyadhita could carefully observe such developments and point out wrong developments. Buddhism has proved it ability to adapt to various cultures and customs. A Buddhism in which women are not equal does not fit in modern times. If Buddhism does not succeed the jump into the 21st century, it will not survive very long for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore women must take and share responsibility with their whole capability. This requires a good general education as well as specific education in Buddhist theory and practice. There are already many good role models whom we can emulate. Everybody has to go their own way, but with the help of Sakyadhita we have a worldwide network to exchange ideas and support each other where needed.

NOTES


Saṅgha: The Enlightened Group of People

Shoyo Taniguchi

The 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held from July 11 to 18, 2002, at Huafan University, Taipei, Taiwan, raised an important issue related to the eight chief rules (gurudharma). I heard a bunch of angry nuns say, “Bhikkhus think they are superior to bhikkunīs,” “Bhikkhus take it for granted to be respected,” “We (bhikkhunī) should question the quality of monks, i.e., the purification of their mind,” “Before ordination, monks are humble, but after they become arrogant,” “Bhikkhus think that bhikkhunīs should kneel down to them,” and “It is shameful that we have to kneel down to monks in public, like in airport.” These nuns, questioning the quality of monks as human persons, defined bhikkhus as arrogant. Hearing them one morning, I asked them: “Do you (bhikkhunī) think you are superior to female laity? From the viewpoint of a laywoman, bhikkhunīs may have exactly the same problem.” In response to my question, all the nuns were silent, but I received a warm welcome from the majority of the lay female participants.

Next morning, on the same panel, I again pushed my question, saying “I am fully ordained in my tradition (Jodo Shinshu tradition). I don't need your answer to my former question. However, each one of us, as ordained women, needs to answer it for herself, “Do I think I am superior to a lay female?” By asking these questions, I challenged the bhikkhunīs present at the conference on the universal problem of human ego, which resides in all ordinary beings, whether female or male, lay or ordained. Ultimately, in the Buddhist path towards the goal of nibbāna, the issue of gender (bhikkhu and bhikkhunī) cannot be separated from the issue of lay (upāsikā) and ordained (bhikkhunī).

This article will attempt to clarify a widespread misunderstanding about the term “saṅgha.” My study will be solely based upon the Pāli Nikāya texts, which are among the earliest, most systematic, and authentic collections of Buddhist texts available today. Since it is known that the Pāli Nikāya texts are not sectarian, and that they may represent the ideas closest to the Buddha's own ideas, findings from these texts can be considered closest to the fundamental and original Buddhist position.

Misunderstandings of Saṅgha

The term “saṅgha” is commonly understood as either the monastic order of bhikkhus and/or bhikkhunīs, or a Buddhist community in general, consisting of the four groups of people (catu parisā) who are followers of the Buddha. Akira Hirakawa, for example, consistently says that “although some believe that the “saṅgha” includes the lay followers, there is no such usage of the term in Early Buddhism. Saṅgha is a Buddhist monastic community.” He also says, “There is no case, in the Nikāya texts and Vinaya Pitaka, that includes the laypeople in saṅgha.” In Theravād countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand, this term is only used for the monastic community today. Hammalawa Saddhatissa also says as follows:
The word “saṅgha” derives from san plus hr, literally, “comprising.” In practice it signifies “multitude” or “assemblage”, but in Buddhist terminology the saṅgha is one assembly and one only, namely, the Order of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis; this without distinction of race, nationality, caste or age.5

Recently, Mohan Wijayaratna says:

The word saṅgha, which literally means a crowd or gathering, came to refer specifically to the Community of monks and nuns in the terminology of Theravāda monasticism. In Pāli texts the term saṅgha does not include lay-followers; these are included in the expression catto parisā, “the fourfold assembly”: bhikkhu (monks), bhikkhunī (nuns), upāsaka and upāsikā (male and female lay followers).6

In Mahāyāna countries like Japan, the term saṅgha is casually understood as a community of Buddhists today. However, within the Nikāya texts, one can see that the term “saṅgha” is used in a distinctive sense that differs from either of the two meanings mentioned above. It may not be easy to prove that the shifts in meanings of the term “saṅgha” were the result of misconceptions, but it is clear that the definition of the term “saṅgha” used in the Pāli Nikāya texts is distinctively different from our current understandings.

**Definition of Saṅgha in the Pāli Nikāya Texts**

In the pre-Buddhist period, the term “saṅgha” was originally used in the sense of a herd or an assembly,8 such as in the term “miga-saṅgha” (a herd of deer).8 It was also used for an assembly or a community of people, such as a guild of business people.9 At the very beginning stage of Buddhism, sāvaka-s gathered simply out of respect for the Buddha and Dhamma and did not claim a special name for their assembly. Since the Jains called their own group of people “gaa,” Buddhists began to adopt the term “saṅgha” for their own.10 They innovated a special and distinctive doctrinal meaning for saṅgha by utilizing this conventional Indian term which originally did not possess such a connotation.11 This connotation constituted a new idea in Indian religious thought by ascribing a uniquely Buddhist concept to the term saṅgha.12 Nikāya texts never use the term “saṅgha” to signify a Buddhist community consisting of the four groups of people, or catu parisā. They make a clear distinction in nature and quality between catu parisā and saṅgha by carefully adopting different expressions. The following two passages, for example, describe saṅgha and catu parisā respectively:

Monks, these four who are accomplished in wisdom, disciplines, confident, deeply learned, Dhamma-bearers, who live according to Dhamma – these four illuminate saṅgha. Which four? Bhikkhu who is accomplished in wisdom . . . who lives according to Dhamma, illuminates saṅgha; bhikkhuni who is accomplished in wisdom . . . illuminates the saṅgha: so also do lay-disciples, both upāsaka and upāsikā. These are the four who, being accomplished in wisdom, disciplined, confident, deeply learned, Dhamma-bearers, living in accordance with Dhamma, illuminate saṅgha.13

Monks, there are these four who illumine parisā. What four? In this case bhikkhu is moral, of a goodly nature, illuminating parisā. Bhikkhu . . . Bhikkhuni . . . Upāsaka . . . Upāsikā is of a like nature. These four illuminate a parisā.14

A comparison of the above two passages reveals several important aspects of both the similarities and differences that characterize the nature of the terms saṅgha and catu parisā. First, both saṅgha and catu parisā are comprised of four groups of people, both monastic and lay, male and female (bhikkhus, bhikkhunis,
Sanhā, the enlightened group of people, consists of four pairs of noble people, which is comprised of upperakaśas, and upāsikās). Second, the quality of sanhā is described as “accomplished in wisdom, disciplines, confident, deeply learned, Dhamma bearing and lives according to Dhamma,” which indicate a much superior nature of the community than the quality of catu parisā which is simply “moral, a goodly nature.” In short, sanhā consisted of a very special group of people, whereas catu parisā consisted of ordinary, good-natured people. One of the suttas in the Anguttara Nikāya clearly states that sanhā is the highest group of people among all groups of people.

The Ratana Sutta of the Sutta Nipta is, perhaps, the best place to look for the Buddhist definition of sanhā, for one can find a more detailed explanation of sanhā in this sutta than in any other sutta of the Nikāya texts:

Eight individuals are praised by good people. They constitute the four pairs. They are the disciples of the Buddha, worthy of offerings. Whatever is offered to them yields abundant fruit. This precious jewel is in the sanhā... Those who are freed from desires are well established in the teaching of Gotama with firm mind. They have attained to that which should be attained, having plunged into immortal nibbāna. They enjoy the peace obtained without price. This precious jewel is in the sanhā....

Just as a city gate fixed in the earth is not shaken by the winds from the four directions, so is the good person, I say, who thoroughly perceives the Noble Truths. This precious jewel is in the sanhā... Those who comprehend clearly the Noble Truths well taught by him or her who is endowed with deep wisdom, however exceedingly heedless they may be, they do not take birth for the eighth time. This precious jewel is in the sanhā.

Three conditions are forsaken by him or her at the instant of acquisition of insight, namely, self-delusion, doubt, and imposed behavior, should there be any. He or she is also absolutely freed from the four states of misery and is incapable of committing the six crimes. This precious jewel is in the sanhā...

Whatever unskillful deed he or she commits, either by his or her body, speech or thought, he or she is incapable of concealing it. For it has been said that such an act is impossible for one who has seen the path. This precious jewel is in the sanhā... As a clump of trees whose tops are blossoming during the first heat of the summer months, so the sublime doctrine leading to nibbāna was taught for the highest goal. This precious jewel is in the sanhā...

With old [kamma] extinct, no new [kamma] to be reproduced, the mind detached from future birth – they have destroyed the seeds of existence. Their desires do not spring up again and those wise ones go out even as this lamp. This precious jewel is in the sanhā...

Some distinctive features of the sanhā are: (1) the sanhā is comprised of four pairs of noble people; (2) members of the sanhā are worthy of offerings; (3) members of the sanhā, freed from desires and well established in the teaching of the Buddha, thoroughly comprehend the Four Noble Truths; (4) members of the sanhā have attained what should be attained, having plunged into nibbāna; (5) members of the sanhā enjoy the peace of nibbāna obtained freely; (6) members of the sanhā have destroyed the seeds of existence, thus, do not take birth for the eighth time; (7) members of the sanhā are absolutely freed from the four states of misery and are incapable of committing the six crimes; and (8) members of the sanhā, whatever the unskilled deed they may commit, either by their body, speech or thought, are incapable of concealing it, for such an act is impossible for those who have seen the path, etc.
The explanation of *sāṅgha* in the Sutta Nipāta is echoed throughout the Nikāya texts. The following *sutta* in the Anguttara Nikāya is almost a summary of the *Ratana Sutta*:

> Wholesome in conduct is the community of disciples of the blessed one (*ariyāsavako sāṅgham*). Honest in conduct is the community of disciples of the blessed one. Wise in conduct is the community of disciples of the blessed one. Proper in conduct is the community of disciples of the blessed one. These four pairs of person, eight individuals (*attha purisapuggala*), this is the community of disciples of the blessed one (*sāvakasangha*). Worthy of offering and hospitality, gifts and homage, it is an incomparable field of merit for the world.\(^{18}\)

Here again the notion of *attha purisapuggala* (eight individuals) is described as people with a special ethical and spiritual development, who could be either monastic or lay. They are accomplished in wisdom, discipline, confidence, deep learning, and live in accordance with the Dhamma. This notion consistently appears in other *suttas* throughout the Nikāyas.\(^{19}\) These people are also referred to as “*ariya-puggala*” (noble persons). It is important to note that the Nikāya texts’ usage of the terms “*sāṅgha*” and “*sāvakā*” is strictly consistent, and that both terms include both monastic persons and householders. The ordinary person (*puthujjana*), whether monastic or lay, is excluded from “*ariya-puggala*,” or members of *sāṅgha* who have attained one of the following states of enlightenment. These enlightened individuals are grouped into four gradual stages of enlightenment: (1) stream-winner (*sotāpanna*); (2) once-returner (*sakadāgāmi*); (3) non-returner (*anāgāmi*); and (4) perfected one (*arahant*). Each stage of enlightenment is further divided into two stages of people, i.e., one who has perfected the state (*magga*) and the other who has entered the path and is in the process of perfection of the state (*phala*), thus making up the total of eight noble stages of enlightenment.\(^{20}\)

Monastics as well as laypeople attained these eight stages of enlightenment. These people constituted the *sāṅgha*. This noble community of people (*sāvakā-sāṅgha*), not simply the monastic community of *bhikkhus* or *bhikkhunis* (*bhikkhu-sāṅgha* or *bhikkhuni-sāṅgha*), is counted as one of the refuges of the Triple Gem or Three Treasures. Kondañña was the first enlightened person (*arahant*) after the Buddha and became the first member of the *sāṅgha* in the history of Buddhism. Then his four other colleagues also became *arahants*. Since all five of these enlightened people\(^{21}\) happened to be monastics, it also happened to be a *bhikkhu-sāṅgha*, in the sense of a monastic community. However, the texts make a clear distinction between these two, i.e., *sāṅgha* (or *sāvakā-sāṅgha*) and *bhikkhu-sāṅgha*; the latter category neither signifies enlightenment nor includes the laity. Specific terms such as “*upāsaka-sāṅgha*” and “*upāsikā-sāṅgha*” for an institutional community of lay followers are absent in the Nikāyas.\(^{22}\) If *sāṅgha* only meant the *bhikkhu-sāṅgha*, then enlightened lay followers would be virtually excluded from the category of the early Buddhist community.\(^{23}\)

On the other hand, the Nikāya texts also adopted the conventional Indian meaning of the word “*sāṅgha*” to refer to the community of fully ordained people, i.e., the *bhikkhu-sāṅgha* or *bhikkhuni-sāṅgha*. In many texts, we see the term “*bhikkhu-sāṅgha*” referring to a large number of monks.\(^{24}\) In this regard, the term *sāṅgha* is used in two ways: *sāvakā-sāṅgha* in the sense of the enlightened people and *bhikkhu-sāṅgha* in the sense of a large number of monks. As we have seen earlier, whenever the term *sāṅgha* appears in the texts specifically to signify the *sāvakā-sāṅgha*, the texts definitively specify it as such. As Perry and Ratnakaya remark, the reader does not have to ponder in deciding its meaning.\(^{25}\)

The Vinaya uses the term *sāṅgha* solely and always in the sense of the monastic community. It is important to note here that the Vinayas usage and the *sutta* usage of the term *sāṅgha* are not identical: In the Vinaya, *sāṅgha* is always *bhikkhu*- or *bhikkhuni*- *sāṅgha* without exception, while in the *suttas*, the term *sāṅgha* is used in two ways: *sāvakā-sāṅgha* and *bhikkhu-sāṅgha*. The Vinaya Piaka is a collection of daily rules and conduct for ordained monastic persons; therefore, *sāṅgha* naturally includes both enlightened and unenlightened monks and nuns.

The Vinaya’s use of the term *sāṅgha* as Bhikkhu Saṅgha or Bhikkhuni Saṅgha refers to the religious institution of monks or nuns, which consists of a majority of unenlightened *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* and...
a few enlightened ones. As Akira Hirakawa states, from the Vinaya position, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis, even if unenlightened, cannot be left out as long as they are members. On the other hand, laypeople are necessarily excluded from the sangha as a monastic order. There is no place in the Vinaya Pitaka where the term sangha is used to include laypeople. As we have established above, however, it is incorrect to identify sangha solely with the organization of Buddhist monks or nuns (bhikkhu-sangha or bhikkhuni-sangha).

The Nikāya texts’ use of the term “sangha,” whether as “sāvaka-sangha” or as “bhikkhu-sangha,” is clear and precise. One of the Nikāya texts even records an instance of confusion about these two usages of the term “sāvaka” by someone who did not adequately understand the distinctive Buddhist connotation. In the Majjhima Nikāya, the former Jain disciple Upāli, after becoming the Buddha’s devotee, tells the Buddha that he takes refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and the “bhikkhu-sāṅgha.” In this case, it should correctly be sāvaka-sangha.

A mixing of the two usages of the term already existed at the time of the writing of the Pāli texts among those who did not understand the two distinctive Buddhist notions of sangha. As time went on, presumably these shifts in the meaning of the term became more firmly entrenched. Nakamura says that at the time of Emperor Asoka, the term sangha had become a proper noun that specifically designated the Buddhist monastic orders (bhikkhu-sangha and bhikkhuni-sangha).

Kyogo Sasaki conjectures that the institutional monastic community of bhikkhu-sangha and bhikkhuni-sangha gradually began to stress a hierarchical superiority over the lay followers (upāsakas and upāsikas). Sasaki also assumes that in this historical process, Buddhism took two different directions: on the one hand, the institutional monastic community formulated the sangha for the later Splinter Buddhist Schools. On the other, those who emphasized lay followers formulated the Mahāyāna bodhisattva movement. However, as Sasaki himself admits, this idea requires further examination and research.

Today, the notion of sāvaka-sangha has virtually escaped from common understanding. A widespread misconception is that bhikkhu-sangha is identical to sāvaka-sangha, while they are in fact two different communities. It is important to note that according to the Nikāya texts, it is sāvaka-sangha that a follower takes refuge in as one of the Triple Gems, not just the bhikkhu-sangha. The shift in meaning of the term “sangha” has become so widespread that the distinctively Buddhist definition of sangha has received little attention in Buddhist scholarship even today.

The Nikāya’s definition of the term sangha as the “enlightened groups of people” is also consistent with the Nikāya’s definition of the term sāvak and existence of numerous numbers of enlightened “upāsaka” (male lay followers) and “upāsikā” (female lay followers). The notion of the lay arahant raises the question not only of whether or not full enlightenment is attainable by the layperson, but also of whether or not the lay arahant can remain a householder after becoming an arahant. One of the non-canonical texts, the Milindapaññhā, discusses the question of whether or not one can attain arahantship as a layperson. According to that work, laypeople can attain arahantship, but after their attainment they should either join the monastic community on the same day or die.

The commentary of the Dhammapada, the Dhammapadatthakathā, also discusses this matter, and mentions examples of householders, such as Dārucāriya and Santatti, who became arahants and passed away. According to G. P. Malalasekera, there is a current belief among the Buddhists of Sri Lanka that when a layperson attains arahantship, he or she should enter the monastic order on the same day or else he or she will die before the end of that day. As Malalasekera says, we cannot trace any evidence from the Nikāya texts to substantiate this idea. In the case of Saddhodana, it is possible to conjecture that he died from his illness or of old age, but not from the attainment of arahantship, for when the Buddha came from Vesli to preach, his father was already about to die. As Malalasekera assumes, the current belief about a lay arahant’s entering the monastic order or dying must have developed from the fact that some laypeople who became arahant joined the monastic order immediately after their attainment, and some became arahant shortly before their death.
It should be mentioned that when a layperson became an anāgāmin (non-returner), he or she led a celibate life. The Nikāya texts often mention that monastic life makes the path and attainment of the goal easier. The Buddha himself, observing the social customs of contemporary Indian society, abandoned conventional relationships, as did many others who sought the spiritual path. The life of a householder was full of personal and social responsibilities. According to the Calabatthipadopama Sutta, the Buddha revealed his attitude regarding household life before his renunciation: “Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy, while living in a home, to lead the holy life, utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell.”

The Sutta Nipāta also describes the life of a layperson as similar to having a barrier, but the life of a monk as like living in the open air. According to the Subha Sutta, however, the Buddha said he would not definitely state which way of life is better for accomplishing the right path – the household life or the monastic life. The Buddha said it depends on whether a person lives rightly or wrongly, not on the person’s life-style. Then, he continued as follows:

I praise a right course both for a householder and for one who has gone forth. Agriculture is like an occupation of a householder with many duties, a large administration and great problem, and trading is like an occupation of one who has gone forth with few duties, a small administration, small problems. Both occupations will produce great fruit if succeeded, and will produce small fruit if failed, but trading has less duties, less administration and less problem.

It is interesting that emphasis is placed on the quantity or amount of conventional duties, administration, and responsibilities, and not on the difference between the monastic person and the householder. The suttas’ position seems to be that becoming a monastic follower by itself, although highly conducive to the path, is neither sufficient nor necessary for attainment of the goal. As for the end result of the path, when successfully pursued, both lifestyles will produce great spiritual fruit.

It is apparent that the monastic order provides more suitable surroundings and an environment for attaining the final goal of Buddhism. Indeed, at a higher level of practice, particularly, it must always be more comfortable to practice as a monastic individual, because the monastic life provides the proper environment for serious practice, as indicated in the Vinaya Pitaka’s ten reasons for the establishment of Vinaya. Perry and Ratnayaka say that entering the monastic order may only ensure that one is able “to spend more time in meditation and service to others than he [sic] would have in the householder’s routine” by gaining “the advantage of time and the kind of religious environment.” Becoming a bhikkhu or a bhikkhuni does not automatically and necessarily guarantee his or her spiritual and ethical development. The Dukkharapaññhā Sutta indicates the difficulty in finding happiness and comfort in the monastic community considering its rules and the difficulties of practice. The following passages from the Dhammapada clearly demonstrate this perspective:

Not by a shaven head does an undisciplined man, who utters lies, become a bhikkhu. How can one who is full of desire and greed be a bhikkhu?

A person is not a bhikkhu merely because he seeks alms from others. He is not a bhikkhu merely for having taken all the code of morality.

These examples illustrate that the reciters/recorders of the Nikāyas themselves acknowledged that becoming a member of the monastic community and becoming more advanced in the path of awakening are two different things. It is noteworthy that according to one of the suttas in the Aṅguttara Nikāya, the Buddha is reputed to have said to Sāriputta that a monk is not praiseworthy merely because he has been a bhikkhu...
for some years. The Buddha listed seven grounds for a bhikkhu to be acclaimed with the phrase, “the monk is praiseworthy.”

The formula the Buddha used on some occasions of ordination or for accepting a person as his monastic disciple (bhikkhu) was, “Come, monks, practice the life of purity (brahma cariya) to bring a complete end to suffering (dukkha).” The purpose of becoming a bhikkhu or a bhikkhuni is to “bring a complete end to suffering (dukkha)” by the elimination of tanhā (craving). Becoming a bhikkhu or a bhikkhuni is not an end in itself. The goal of bringing a complete end to suffering is not exclusively limited to monks and nuns, but is also shared by upāsaka and upāsikā. Perry and Ratnayaka, saying that “monasticism does not constitute the religious objective,” further state:

Becoming a monk [or a nun] improves one’s opportunity for advancing in knowledge and practice of the Dhamma only if the individual perceives it so. Others may prefer the householder’s responsibilities over the Vinaya regimen not because they lack the fortitude to adhere to the exacting Vinaya demands, but because with religious sincerity they perceive the householder’s life as holding for them the best opportunity to advance in knowledge and practice of the dhamma... The path leading to that saṅgha of blessed persons is a path of mental purification which may be pursued as successfully through family life responsibilities as through monastic regimen... Monasticism counts for nothing; householding counts for nothing. Purifying the mind counts for everything.

The above remarks seem to precisely represent a pivotal aspect of Buddhism. On the path to nibbāna, it is ultimately the cultivation of wholesome behavior (sīla), mental concentration (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā) that counts, not the difference of lifestyle.

It is difficult for a third party to conjecture about the reasons one person may wish to become a bhikkhu (or a bhikkhuni) while another may wish to remain an upāsaka (or upāsikā), after each has experienced perhaps the same level of happiness by listening to Dhamma. The following two passages from the Sutta Nipāta illustrate this point. Both of them are joyful utterances expressed after listening to Dhamma.

The first is by a person who later decides to become an upāsaka, and the second is by a person who wishes to become a bhikkhu. When the Buddha had spoken, the brahmin Aggika Brāradvāja exclaimed:

It is amazing, Venerable Gotama, it is wonderful, Venerable Gotama! Just as if one might raise what has been overturned, or reveal what has been hidden, or point out the way to him who has gone astray, or hold out a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes may see objects, so likewise has the Truth been explained by Venerable Gotama in various ways. Therefore, I take refuge in him, his Dhamma and his Saṅgha. May the Venerable Gotama accept me as a lay follower who henceforth has taken refuge in him for the rest of his life!

Then Kasābhāradvāja, greatly excited and with hair standing on end, approached the Buddha and fell with his head at the Master’s feet, saying:

It is amazing, Venerable Gotama, it is wonderful, Venerable Gotama! Just as if one might raise what has been overturned, or reveal what has been hidden, or point out the way to him who has gone astray, or hold out a lamp in the dark so that those who have eyes may see objects, so likewise has the Truth been explained by Venerable Gotama in various ways. Therefore, I take refuge in him, his Dhamma and his Saṅgha. I wish to enter the homeless life and to receive the higher ordination near the Venerable Gotama.
The above passages use identical expressions to describe two different people’s mental states. This suggests that both shared the same depth of joy, insight and appreciation of Dhamma. Hirakawa says that a person’s decision to enter the monastic order, or not, seems to be beyond the speculation of a third party. But, one can assume with certainty that conditions such as a person’s responsibilities, duties, and family situation constitute major factors of the decision to enter the homeless life. The fact that the same expression is used in both of the above passages also indicates that the Nikāya texts did not make a hierarchical distinction based on a person’s decision about whether or not to become a bhikkhu (or a bhikkhuni).

Beyond the difference of being a forest monk, a village monk, or a householder, purity of mind and action is the principle to be utilized and adopted in the path of liberation. The difference between the monk/nun and the householder ultimately boils down to a difference of lifestyle. Monks and nuns have minimal conventional duties and responsibilities and therefore can devote themselves to the full-time practice of Dhamma. Householders, on the other hand, have a higher degree of conventional duties and responsibilities and consequently can only permit part-time practice of Dhamma.

The above argument does not mean that little difference existed between those who dwelt in monasteries and those who remained at home. There is little doubt that high praise was given to those who left home to strike out on a path of fully committed training. The monks and nuns, while undergoing the full-time study, training and practice of Dhamma, also taught and guided the lay followers depending on their level of understanding. Due to this full commitment of the monks and nuns, Dhamma became more accessible to the laity.

Above all, the life of the monastic order was one of moderation compared to that of the laity. This created a more conducive environment for reaching the goal. One can easily surmise that monastic people were more seriously committed to their own learning and practice, and to educating others; as a result, they gradually became the mainstream of the movement. As Hirakawa assumes, gradually such a transition further promoted the establishment of a hierarchical structure among the Buddhist communities, namely, the position of the monastic person became superior to that of the laypeople.

Conclusion

Buddhism represented by the Nikāya texts is a gradual educational system that is applicable to any individual, depending on the person’s ethical and spiritual development. At the inception of Buddhism, both lay practitioners and monastic people actively participated in the teaching/learning process by adopting the Buddhist method of gradual instruction (anupubba-kathā), gradual training (anupubba-sikkhā), gradual course (anupubba-paipadā) and gradual doing (anupubba-kiriyā). The final goal of this educational system, nibbāna, is was attained by the Buddha and the first five arahants without following any specific list of sikkhapada (rules of training). There was no Vinaya sikkhapada for the monastic group of people at the very first stage of Buddhism and yet many of them attained enlightenment. The enlightened lay people did not follow the Vinaya sikkhapada. One can safely conclude that observation of sikkhapada, whether the Vinaya sikkhapada or the fundamental sikkhapada (the five ethical guidelines), may be helpful but is not essential in the path towards nibbāna. The Nikāyas clearly state that perfection of sila is nibbāna. All enlightened people had sila, but did not necessarily need the sikkhapada. The Vinaya sikkhapada is not sufficient for attaining nibbāna, either. The path to nibbāna is the gradual reduction and the final eradication of tanhā (self-centeredness), not the perfection of Vinaya (sikkhapada) or a difference of lifestyle. The issue is not shaving the head or wearing the robe; what counts is the degree of tanhā.
NOTES

1. One of the most recent cases of this usage appears in Mohan Wijayaratna’s *Buddhist Monastic Life*, trans. Claude Grangier and Steven Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 16. There have been innumerable others, such as Kogen Mizuno, Akira Hirakawa, Hammalava Saddhatissa. It should be mentioned that the Pali Text Society’s English edition of the Pāli texts consistently translates the term *saṅgha* as the “Order” or the “church.” E.g., D. II. 93–94; S. I. 220, etc.


12. Ibid., p. 43.

13. A. II. p. 8. In the P.T.S. English translation, F. L. Woodward uses the term “Order” for *saṅgha*. If the term is used to denote “priesthood” or “clergy,” then it is wrongly translated. If not, then the term “Order” should denote the fourth definition of the term “order” that appears in the Oxford English Dictionary: “A class, group, kind, or sort, of persons, beings, or things, having its rank in a scale of being, excellence, or importance, or distinguished from others by nature or character. In the Nikāyas, *saṅgha* does not indicate a monastic order of monks or nuns.


15. A. IV. 34.


17. The four states of misery are (1) *naraka* (state of woe), (2) animal kingdom, (3) ghost plane, and (4) demon world. The six heinous crimes are (1) matricide, (2) patricide, (3) killing an *arahant*, (4) causing a schism in the Saṅgha, (5) wounding a Buddha, and (6) upholding wrong views. Cf., Sutta Nipāta.

18. A. I. 208. The P.T.S. English edition of the Pāli Nikāya texts almost always translates the term “*saṅgha*” in the institutional sense, i.e., the “Order” or the “church.”

20. The eight noble states can be roughly classified into two groups: (1) asekḥ or those who have no need of further training, which are referred to as arahants, and (2) sękḥ or those who are still undergoing training, but have already made significant spiritual progress in the path. Cf., Katz, *Buddhist Images of Human Perfection*, pp. 83-84.


23. The current usage of the term Saṅgha as the community of monks (or nuns) is a development within the Buddhist community and is not a scholarly interpretation. Here, I discuss a distinctive usage of “saṅgha” in the Pāli Nikāya Canon.

24. See, e.g., D. I. 1; D. III. 207, among others.


27. Ibid., p. 45.

28. Ibid., p. 42.

29. M. I. 379.


32. Ibid.


36. Ibid., II, p. 209.

37. Ibid., III. p. 78.


42. *Cūlahatthipadopama Sutta*, M. I. 179.

43. Sn. 406.

44. M. II. 197.


46. Ibid.

47. Dh. 9, 19.

49. Dh. 264.
50. Dh. 266.
51. A. IV. 34.
53. Ibid., pp. 54-55.
54. Sn. 142.
55. Sn. 82.
57. Ibid., p. 102.
Buddhism
Today
Practice as a Path to Crosscultural Religious Understanding

Anne Carolyn Klein

Does devotion to one’s own tradition require denigrating, however subtly, someone else’s? It seems to me a rather simple question, but one that is of enormous consequence both psychologically and politically. By endeavoring to see one’s own tradition as a path of practice – and every tradition on the face of the earth can be understood to offer that opportunity in its own unique fashion – we can begin to harmonize particular religious loyalties with more generic religious or spiritual appreciation.

As students of dependent arising, it is important to acknowledge that religious intolerance arises not only because of differing religious beliefs – it arises also because of political, historical, and economic conditions. In modeling crosscultural conversation, there are two vitally important things to model: (1) that a religious tradition can be both dedicated to a personal path of spiritual unfolding and concerned with bettering the world; and (2) that one can both be dedicated to one’s own tradition and immeasurably supportive of others.

Let me set the scene with a question, an image, and two quotations. The question, already alluded to, is this: Can you give your full energies to your own path if you believe, or even suspect, that another way is just as good? After all, what prevents many persons from appreciating other religions is a sense of disloyalty, as well as a sense that the other is inferior, strange, or downright malevolent.

A more subtle sub-question is: Can you really experience the fullest dimension of your spiritual unfolding if you are holding out a sense of reified superiority or disdain for another tradition? Rumi tells of a shepherd, scolded by Moses for chattering to God like a doting mother, in the beautiful adaptation by Coleman Banks: “I want to bring you milk, to kiss your little hands and feet when it’s time for you to go to bed. I want to sweep your room and keep it neat…” Moses can’t stand this. Don’t talk that way to the Creator! Then both of them gain a larger spiritual vision. Moses sees that the religion of love has no code or doctrine, only God. Here “God” is of course defined through both a specific tradition and a particular spiritual connection, personally and deeply felt. Moses apologizes to the shepherd, who has meanwhile been wandering through the open desert. He has gone beyond even this devotional freedom:

You applied the whip and my horse shied and jumped out of itself.
The divine nature and my human nature came
Together….When you eventually see through
The veils to how things really are
you will keep saying again
and again
“This is certainly not like we thought it was.”

Such profound humility, which has nothing to do with uncertainty about one’s own vision, is both a spiritual opening and an avenue of interreligious tolerance.
For a most profound and beautiful image that will lead us back to this question, we turn to the marvelous film “Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter and Spring,” by the brilliant Korean writer-director Kim Ki-duk. Much of the film takes place inside a one-room monastery, floating on a lake. The space within is broken only by a door – not a wall, but a door complete with a door knob. The door frame hangs in empty space. When the old monk enters carefully through the door in the morning to wake his sleeping charge, the audience laughs. He could just as easily have walked through the empty space on either side. The door is at once unnecessary, arbitrary, and absolutely crucial. It is unnecessary because there is an easy passageway on either side of it. There is only empty space to the left and right of the door. The same is true of an ornately decorated swinging door set on the shore opposite the monastery, an isolated stretch of nature unadorned by any other human-made artifact whatsoever. Here too, the door itself is the only wall present. It is therefore is both pathway and obstruction. This is an image to which we shall return.

Each of our different traditions offers a door that is both a boundary and an opening. Like doors, much in religious traditions can seem arbitrarily placed. To some extent, perhaps a greater extent than we would like to think, the precise form a tradition takes is arbitrary. Still, the Buddhist path is an opening to Buddhists; to others it may be arbitrary and unnecessary obstruction.

Great practitioners of every tradition are vitally, profoundly, and unwaveringly committed to their own practices and beliefs with every fiber of their being. They focus on their own doorway, maybe even call it the only one. These claims to uniqueness have a psychological truth that cannot be ignored. Recognizing this brings us back to our question: Is it possible to be utterly devoted to your practice, your faith, your love of your own scriptures, and the wisdom to which they open, and still have not only respect but genuine enthusiasm for other religious traditions. We know some great persons who have shown the way here – His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Christian mystic Thomas Merton are among the best known examples.

We know that, like nothing else, religion has the power to bring us together and to divide us. It is deeply personal, and powerfully public. We play with fire when we play with religion – the fire of wisdom and much worse kinds of fires, too. Indeed, the newly interconnected global village has given rise to interreligious strife that is unprecedentedly public and dangerous. It also brings a potential for religious dialogue that is also unprecedented. If we cannot peaceably coexist, perhaps these traditions should become one? Should we work to fabricate a single door composed of those few points – if any – on which all agree?

At Rice University in 1991 a student asked his Holiness the Dalai Lama whether he thought that in the future there would be only one religion in the world. The Dalai Lama, responded in a flash. “I hope not,” he said emphatically. The many religious and spiritual traditions in the world offer myriad doorways and indeed whole mansions that spring from the specific perspectives, needs, and histories of any given people. Still the question lingers – could you give your full energies to your own path if you believed, or even suspected, that another way was just as good? We are ready to take this matter further by asking what resources our own Buddhist traditions can provide that allow us to model genuine religious and cultural tolerance, perhaps even sympathetic appreciation, in ways that take account both of the arbitrariness and the necessity of specific doorways.

Buddhist traditions speak of the Dharma which is transmission or scripture and the Dharma which is realized. Among the Three Jewels, it is the realized Dharma which actually liberates. So, to explore our question, we look here at connections between the two. In Words of My Perfect Teacher, Patrul Rinpoche wrote:

In your mother’s womb, turn your mind to the Dharma.
As soon as you are born, remember the Dharma of death.

How can I have this kind of dedication and at the same honor those who turn their minds to the Koran, to the body of Christ, to the Hindu saints?
One clue is in the very word “dharma” itself. The traditions to which Westerners refer to as Buddhism or Hinduism is not a religion, but a dharma. Dharma, which has many meanings in the Buddhist tradition, comes from the Sanskrit root dhr which means “to hold.” The Dharma is what holds us, holds us in the blissful embrace of wisdom, or, failing that, at least holds us back from the wrongful actions that plunge us more deeply into the fires of samsāra. Can we be held without feeling that everyone else must be held in the same day, must construct their doorway in the same manner?

In a forthcoming article Jeffrey Kripal speaks of the necessity for crosscultural religious understanding of simultaneously “denying the ultimacy of cultural and ethnic differences, and celebrating their psychological necessity.” In other words, he finds that a willingness to acknowledge that nothing is ontologically ultimate – however important it may be in other ways – provides enormous room for religious cross-understanding.

Let us talk a little bit then about the Dharma doorways. Ever since Candrakrti reputedly milked the picture of a cow, we have, as a tradition, been well aware of the conventional status of everything we do, say, and think. The ongoing genius of Buddhist scripture and practice is to fine-tune an understanding of how, although there is no findable self, our actions matter profoundly. In my classrooms, in my temple, someone is always sliding toward nihilism, wondering how it can be that, if all is empty, anyone would bother with study, ethics, or meditation. They are always astonished to learn that the doctrine of emptiness makes the doctrine of karma possible; indeed, as Nagārjuna famously said, for whom emptiness is possible, everything is possible. Part of my point today is that crosscultural sensitivity is possible because those cultures themselves are simply doorways constructed at certain points along the spacious continuum of possibility.

I am not, however, saying that we, much less persons of other traditions, must realize emptiness in order to talk to each other! My point is quite the opposite: that by considering insights and other reports from the height of mystical insight, and by incorporating whatever insight we have touched on ourselves, we learn something important about our human capacity, which includes the capacity to be both loyal and open.

For example, it is a defining characteristic of Buddhist traditions to avoid both permanence and annihilation, that is, to find meaning in a world understood as illusory. This is actually something we do all the time – we do it as children when we play “Let’s pretend” and we do it all our lives at the movies or at sports events, even if those events also sometimes distract us so much that, in the moment, we think they are ultimate and have to be reminded, “It’s only a game.” In short, it is clear that we have the wherewithal to recognize that the doors of convention are, to an extent, arbitrary and still engage them actively.

But this recognition is only the first step through the doorway of tolerance and sympathy that I want to describe and that I am suggesting we model. Buddhist traditions have a very particular emphasis and highly articulate reflections on the way in which things are not ultimate. We can and should put this in the service of the contemporary worldwide need for religious and crosscultural understanding.

However, it is still true that at the level of ideas, there will always be disagreements, clashes, and arguments among peoples of different faiths and even of the same faith. Where ideas clash, however, practices converge. Most of the widely practiced religions of the world are in basic agreement about the importance of treating others as one would like to be treated, of recognizing, as the Tibetan master Gyal-tsap says, that all suffering is the suffering of a someone who, just like me, does not want any of it. This general appeal to religious co-understanding is quite popular. I am proposing to take it further.

What is especially significant, and also challenging, about Buddhist descriptions of how things exist, is that such descriptions are always, implicitly or explicitly, matched by a reflection on the type of person, the type of mind, the type of inner space, that is required or assumed in order to understand that. The emptiness of Madhyamika, according to classic presentations of the grounds and paths, can only be realized by a mind trained in śamatha. For example, in Mahāyāna traditions full enlightenment is only possible for those committed to benefiting others; tantric practice is only available to those who have developed some understanding of emptiness and bodhicitta. All of these qualities create a certain ambience, a certain spaciousness of mind, which makes further realization possible.
It is well known that the place where wisdom joins to compassion, or insight to worldly engagement, is mindfulness. One of the most well known and widely used instructions for developing mindfulness and concentration in Buddhist traditions is the *Foundations of Mindfulness Sūtra*. The first object of mindfulness is the body and the opening instructions for this practice begin with instructions on how, and under what conditions, to sit.

How does one practice contemplation on the body?

...having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, [one] sits down cross-legged, keeps the body erect and mindfulness alert.\(^4\)

We note that the text opens with a question, which models the type of curious, inquiring attention Zen calls “beginner’s mind,” open and interested – qualities that also make one a good conversation partner within and across traditions.

But there is more that is notable here. The erectness of the body is a direct allusion to the principle that the *prāna* (*rlung*) which flows through the body and moves more smoothly when the body is straight. A straight body means straight channels through which these winds move. This is significant because these winds or inner currents are the support of consciousness. When the mind is carried gently, by a smoothly mobile wind, it is relaxed, and perception itself becomes clearer, yielding insight. This is the experience of millennia of practitioners in many traditions throughout the world. Thus the body is important in accessing the expansive spaces of contemplative practice known in all traditions. Here “space” is meant as a general term to encompass experiences of calm, expansiveness, illusoriness, clarity, or other qualities associated with the cultivation of wisdom.

One does not have to be a yogi in the forest to begin to taste this and to appreciate that any participant in any religious tradition – whether through song, or bowing, or silence, or ritual – is, in effect, providing a smoother route through their own body for their own energies. The sign of the cross, for example, can be interpreted as modeling the kind of erect vertical lines associated with reaching to the heavens and acknowledging the hells (as Buddhists do in a different way, often through daily recitations) and the horizontal gesture an indication of the open heart that Christ exhibited on the cross, that bodhisattvas present to the world on a daily basis. My teacher Geshe Wangyal, perhaps the very first Tibetan geshe to live in the West, used to say in his unique English that bodhisattvas are the true cosmopolitans. They see themselves in everyone and are at home everywhere. We can recognize that the singing of Christian hymns, like the chanting of Tibetan or Pāli *sādhanas*, has a stilling, smoothing effect on the mind-body complex, regardless of how differently the words might describe the world.

We have no time here to explore these interesting or dissimilar parallels further – for example, the centrality of the heart in Tantric and Christian symbolism, and the very different meanings associated with it. But let us note that in many traditions, most certainly in Buddhism, and also in Christian, especially Catholic, theology, reflections on the meaning of their own symbols are crucial for exploring the possibility of a nondual, or even just profoundly interactive, relationship between the mundane and supermundane, between conventional and ultimate, transcendent and immanent.

In Buddhism, this is often addressed through discussions in the *trikāya* theory. In Christianity it centers around questions about the status of Jesus’ earthly body as human or divine; for many, this itself is the door by which one exits orthodoxy and enters heterodoxy. Even granting enormous differences, we are all curious to find a doorway that allows easy passage between these two kinds of worlds, or perhaps a doorway that opens and finds them to be one world. Without expanding into a reflection on the relationship between such “mystical” experience and doctrinal positions, we can say that, to a significant degree, the fundamental questions are profoundly parallel.

There are, to be sure, elements of practice available in full only to the great yogis, mystics, or saints. My
point, however, is that these insights, even second hand, speak to us ordinary folks about who we are, right now. And this is why they pertain as well to the possibility of our talking to each other. Practice involves every dimension of our being. Body, speech, and mind are all engaged.\(^5\) Across traditions, the wisdom to which we aspire is intellectual, it is psychological, it is emotional, it is spiritual, it is energetic. Being fully engaged – in body, speech, and mind – means getting to know our own human faculties and their capacities. It means coming to some understanding of what we are capable of – physically, energetically, and spiritually.

Understanding ourselves, we understand others. Śāntideva famously observed that everyone wants happiness just as I do, and that it therefore makes good sense to put the happiness of the many others at least on a par with my own, if not higher than my own, as do the true bodhisattvas. If we take this seriously, then we must maintain a beginner’s mind throughout our practice, knowing that whatever we learn about ourselves may open a door to understanding of others. This is not the essentialism of saying we are all the same, but we do have remarkably analogous tendencies as human beings, and especially, perhaps, as religiously inspired human beings.

I want to strongly suggest that at their most refined, traditions that look so different in terms of customs, theologies, and rituals begin to look far more similar. Many, if not most, traditions have an esoteric perspective which softens the rigidity, challenges the conventions, of the tradition itself, all for the purpose of emphasizing that the divine, reality, Christ, Buddha, or G-d, cannot be limited in any way. It is worth considering that the innermost secret of any tradition – Jewish Kabbalah, Muslim Sufism, Christian Gnosticism, Buddhist Tantrism – is a touchstone for further spiritual growth and discovery.

These “mystical moments” are also the founding moments of the great traditions. Moses at Sinai, Buddha under the pipal (\textit{bodhi}) tree, Mary Magdalene seeing the risen Christ – all these are events that are not simply events of the ordinary mind and ordinary senses – they are openings into a larger world to which the ordinary senses provide only partial doorways.

My even simpler point is that anyone who understands their tradition as a path – a path to Christ Nature, a path to Buddhahood, a path to the One, the Divine, to Heaven, or a Pure Land – feels challenged by the mystery of where that path may lead and from what wisdom source it emerges. When this profound mystery is the focal point, the door to crosscultural exchange opens wider. It tends to be less welcoming when the greater emphasis is on tradition as a point of allegiance, political alignment, family heritage, or institutions (even though it may \textit{also} be those things).

When one’s religion is a path that leads inward, then the emphasis becomes less on others’ failings and more on one’s own spiritual curiosity. This curiosity, focused inward, is also a swinging door that opens onto a much wider world than the world of mere dogma describes. For one blessed with spiritual curiosity, even a glimpse at the profoundly mysterious and magnificent Reality at the heart of one’s own tradition can inspire an awed humility in the face of its indescribable depths. Touching into it, even a little bit, quiets qualms about there being only one way to represent or apprehend this.

In my usage here, admittedly a grand oversimplification, a path of any kind means that a central focus is one’s own situation \textit{vis a vis} one’s own positive and negative experiences or qualities – or, to put this another way, an examination of the extent to which the divine resonates within one’s own body, whether in Christian sacrament, Jewish prayer, or Buddhist \textit{ganacakra}. The body is important in accessing that space and the way that different traditions articulate what that kind of space feels like. Here “space” is meant as a general term to encompass experiences of calm, expansiveness, illusoriness, clarity, or other quality associated with the cultivation of wisdom, as any Buddhist tradition might understand this.

Buddhist traditions have a very particular emphasis, and highly articulate reflections on the way in which things are not ultimate. We can and should put this in the service of the contemporary worldwide need for religious and crosscultural understanding.

In the Dzogchen traditions, for example, “unbounded wholeness” is a central concept. It describes a reality that is both infinitely variable and altogether unified. Indeed, diversity, though ordinarily considered
the antithesis of oneness, is here offered as proof that unbounded wholeness exists. Being so diverse, and constantly changing besides, means that unbounded wholeness has no defining characteristic or stable identity. It is in this sense indefinite. Writers as diverse as the eighth-century adept who brought Bon texts from Zhang Zhung to Tibet, Lishu Daring, and the great fourteenth-century Tibetan Longchen Rabjam, define it as “indefinite” (ma nges pa). How can indefiniteness be a characteristic of reality? How can one develop authentic trust or confidence in such an unstable reality? This conundrum, expressed in here in metaphysical terms, is also simply a restating of the question with which we began here – how can my confidence in my tradition be definitive and unwavering if the reality at its center is “indefinite.” Yet, if it is “definite,” it is limited. The familiar pitfalls of nihilism and overdetermination must be avoided as we encounter other traditions. “They are worthless” is one extreme, “I cannot find confidence in anything” is another. Yet, it is a hallmark of the enlightened state not to overly define. When it comes to reality, say the Dzogchen traditions, even Samantabhadra, cannot say “IT is like this.”

But this does not mean we collapse into relativity and an inability to commit to something. To understand how this can be, we must understand a little better some of the qualities of the kind of state in which we are both focused and open, committed and tolerant.

NOTES


2. Patrul Rinpoche, The Words of My Perfect Teacher


4. Nyanaponika Thera, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1996). This is a slight paraphrase of Nyanaponika Thera’s translation. The passage is explicitly directed to monks, but is now so widely used among laypersons that I took the liberty of keeping the language more open here.


6. For a detailed discussion of this important term, see Anne C. Klein and Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, Unbounded Wholeness: Bon, Dzogchen, and the Logic of the Nonconceptual (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

7. In the Perfection (phar phyin) literature and in Madhyamaka generally, “substantial establishment” is an explicit object of negation (dag bya); here it is not. A strikingly similar passage occurs in the commentary to Six Expanses (kLong drug). Because the base is indefinite, we read, nothing at all is established; everything arises unceasingly. Because of the indefiniteness of nothing being established and because everything arises from it, we do not identify the base by saying “this is.” There is no identification of the base as “this is.” See 257.3ff. The theme of indefiniteness is also found, among other places, in the Six Expanses (kLong drug), one of the famous Seventeen Tantras of Nyingma Dzogchen. See 257.4. See also Authenticity of Open Awareness (gTan tshig gal mdo rig pa’I tshad ma), translated in Klein and Wangyal. Likewise, in Gnas lugs mdzod, Chapter II, Longchenpa says much the same thing.
On the Equality of Beings in Buddhist Ecology

Oksun An

According to the Buddhist worldview, every being is interconnected and interrelated. There is no boundary among things, whether they are sentient or not. All things together participate in one holistic life process. This is what ecology means for Buddhists. Whether it is called Green Buddhism, Eco-Buddhism, or Buddhist environmental ethics, it assumes that there is one organic and holistic life process in which all things participate limitlessly and mutually interact.

There is nothing that does not affect this holistic process of life. Each participant is integrated in the process, and affects all other members. The famous words of the Huayen school of Buddhism, “one is many and many is one,” is a good example of how this holistic life process is expressed. This perspective must be taken into account in understanding the present ecocrisis.

The present ecological crisis is caused by human beings who treat other members of this holistic life process in improper ways. They harm other beings due to the three mental defilements \( (\text{rāga, dosa, and mohā}) \) and three types of unwholesome actions of body, speech, and thought. As a consequence, the holistic life process, including human beings themselves, suffers. If the ecocrisis is caused by human beings, then solving it is also dependent on human beings. Resolving the ecocrisis is a matter of eliminating the three mental defilements and the three types of unwholesome actions. In other words, healing our world is a matter of purifying the mind \( (\text{citta visuddhi}) \) and purifying our actions \( (\text{kamma visuddhi}) \). This is the heart of Buddhist ecology.

Purity of mind and purity of actions require self-transformation in the ways of thinking and living of each individual. Human beings need to move from self- or human-centered approaches to life to eco-centered lifestyles, from antagonistic attitudes to symbiotic attitudes, from individual-centered ways of life to relation-centered ways, and from being-centered approaches to life to process-centered approaches. These shifts in consciousness and action require human beings to give the same value to the other participants in the holistic life process as they do to themselves, and to treat the other members of the ecosystem in the same ways that they treat themselves. Specifically, this requires human beings to practice non-harming, compassion, and loving kindness.

From this perspective, the present ecocrisis and its resolution can be explained in terms of human beings’ disrespectful, unequal treatment of some beings and their respectful, equal treatment of other beings. This article looks at the heart of Buddhist ecology in terms of the notion of equality. First, it explores the concept of the equality of all beings and its epistemological foundations from the perspective of Buddhist ecology. Second, it explains the world ecocrisis in terms of early Buddhist perspectives on human beings’ attitudes and actions \( (\text{kamma}) \) in treating other beings unequally. Finally, it looks at specific ways of practicing equal treatment as a way of healing the ecocrisis.

My position in this paper is that of early Buddhism. As a result of examining the early Buddhist position, I argue that because the current ecocrisis emerged from humans’ treating other beings unequally on the basis
of the three mental defilements and impure actions, so the method for healing the ecocrisis is to recover pure mental states and actions. The method of healing is to respect and treat all the participants in this holistic world system with the same attitudes that we treat ourselves by practicing the virtues of non-harming, compassion, and loving kindness. In a word, to respect the equality of life of all beings with a pure mind and pure actions is the essence of Buddhist ecology.

The Meaning of Equality and Its Epistemological Ground

“Samānatta” in Pāli can be translated as “equal to (samāna) me (attan),” or “the same as me.” “Equal” or “the same” implies epistemological sameness (or similarity). This term also implies an ethical sameness, meaning an “equality” that requires one being to treat other beings “just as I treat myself.” The core meaning of equality in early Buddhism is “caring for other beings just as I care for myself,” whereas “equality” in English assumes that everyone has the same rights as others do with regard to capability, quantity, effect, value, privilege or status.

From the perspective of early Buddhist ecology, “equality” must be understood not as “epistemological sameness” but more fully as “ethical sameness.” On the one hand, this is because not only humans and animals, but also plants and non-living beings, are included as the objects of equality, even though all differ from each other in their characters and shapes. On the other hand, this is because sameness in terms of ethical treatment is emphasized, not epistemological sameness. From this perspective, we can define “equality” as an appreciation of the uniqueness of all living and non-living beings as participants in the activities of one holistic life process or ecosystem, and therefore treat all of them with the same attitude and care as we treat ourself.” It is a matter of respect for each member’s place, role, and characteristics, not as viewed from the perspective of human beings, but from the perspective of one holistic life system.

The attitude of treating all things as we would treat ourselves does not mean that we treat every being in the same way. Rather, it means that we respect them in different ways in accordance with their situations and characteristics. The “ways” of treating things are different, but the “attitudes” with which we treat them are the same. For example, the ways we treat adults are different from the ways we treat children, although the attitudes with which we treat them are the same. This is the same in the case of humans and animals, animals and plants, and plants and the earth. The meaning of “equality” through the practice of respect does not mean that we treat things equally on the basis of their “sameness,” but rather “equality” is the treating of things in the manner appropriate to each thing by recognizing their “non-sameness.”

This kind of respect is neither caught up in the thought of “sameness,” nor in notions of “superiority” or “inferiority.” Both the thoughts of superiority and inferiority are abandoned, because each being’s positions, roles, and characteristics are not the same; each of them has an incomparable uniqueness. Thus, the Buddha asks one to abandon these three attitudes: “I am superior (seyya),” “I am the same (sadiso),” and “I am inferior (hinā).”

These three attitudes are usually applied among people in a narrow sense, but they can also be extended and applied to all the beings of the one holistic world. All things within the holistic world system, including non-living beings such as earth, water, fire, and air; plants such as grasses and trees; and the various animals are all appreciated in the context of their places, roles, and uniqueness. Humans need to abandon the thought of superiority and inferiority with regard to not only human individuals but also the human species as a whole. Needless to say, it is also important to abandon the thought of sameness. Asking human beings to abandon the thought of sameness is based on an awareness that all beings are of the same nature, in that they are all subject to impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā). When these attitudes are interpreted in an active way, they can be understood as requiring us to admit the unique characteristics of other beings who are different from ourselves or different from the human species. What all this means is that we must respect each being, which is similar to David Miller’s notion of “social equality.”
Miller says that social equality is different from justice-related and distributive equality in that it respects people and treats them equally. Social equality does not mean that everyone should be equal with respect to power or wealth, nor with respect to strength and intelligence. Instead, it says that inequalities are not conducive to constructing a healthy society. Social equality is concerned with how we respect each other and how we build social relations. The core of this notion of social equality is to accept social and biological differences, and extend respect. Without connecting differences into discrimination, they are appreciated.

Miller's notion of social equality can be applied to all things. The differences between all things within this holistic life system can be accepted, appreciated, and respected. No two things, even two beings within the same species, are exactly the same. Therefore, one should not think “I am the same,” but be aware and respectful of differences. “Non-sameness” is considered not as a basis for discrimination but as a basis for respect.

This notion of equality as respect, which applies to all things, does not seek sameness, equal distribution, justice, or rights. It gives value to differences, sharing, relationships, and caring. This equality is not an equality that claims equality, but one that emphasizes responsibility. This equality is not a compulsory norm, but a virtue of respect that is required for inner character. This equality is an attitude that is in accordance with the realities of a unitary, holistic life system.

**Equality, Dependent Arising, and the Universal Desire for Happiness**

This equality, as a kind of an ethical attitude, is epistemologically grounded on the principle of dependent arising (paiccasamuppāda). As is well known, the principle of dependent arising explains being, non-being, arising, and ceasing in terms of the unspecific pronouns “this (imasmim)” and “that (idam).” All things can be substituted for “this” and “that,” which creates relationships without limit among them and explains how all things participate in the holistic process of life. All things that are involved in this holistic process of life are equally important, because they are all interconnected with each other and mutually interdependent. Thus, all beings and all their activities are equally valuable and deserving of respect.

However, the mutual interconnectedness and interdependence of all the beings does not confirm that all of them are equal, for it is possible to construct an unequal, exploitive connectedness or dependence. An unequal, exploitative connectedness and dependence is one that benefits only one being and harms others. In this case, one specific being or species may benefit only its own species and may take advantage of other beings and species. For example, a physically stronger or more intelligent species can construct an exploitive connectedness or dependence on others.

To exclude or prevent this type of unequal connectedness and dependence, it is necessary to consider the nature of beings as seeking happiness and avoiding suffering, in addition to the principle of dependent arising. When the Buddha advises compassion as a requirement for dependent arising, he reminds us that, like ourselves, all sentient beings desire happiness and wish to avoid suffering. He says that every sentient being seeks happiness and life and avoids suffering and death; they do not want to be harmed, but to be cared for. He continues by saying that, reflecting on this fact, we should be compassionate toward all living beings.

In principle, the desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering applies only to sentient beings. However, this desire can be modified and applied to plants and non-living beings, also. A desire for the thriving of plants, comparable to the thriving of sentient beings, would be congruent with the teachings of the Buddha, as would the projection of a desire for happiness, preservation, and the avoidance of suffering to non-living beings. This can be “projected,” because non-living beings are not able to have desires like sentient beings’ desires, but do provide the circumstances for habitation by living beings. In sum, like living beings or sentient beings, plants and non-living beings desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering; sentient beings have a desire for the thriving of life, whereas plants and non-living beings have a desire projected by sentient beings.
If we can apply the desire for seeking happiness and avoiding suffering to plants and non-living beings, the relationships of mutual dependence should not be unequal. These relationships should be equal, out of respect for their equal “desire.” In other words, their limitless mutual connectedness and interdependence presuppose respect for each other.

Because the principle of dependent arising presupposes the universality of the desire to seek happiness and avoid suffering, it excludes unequal mutual connectedness and dependence, and accepts only equal relations among all beings. In this way, it is possible to have a notion of equality that respects each and every being. Furthermore, with regard to the degree of respect, we are required to have the same attitude of respect toward all things that we have toward ourselves.

Unequal Actions and Attitudes as the Cause of Ecocrisis

Although everything that exists in this holistic world system should be treated equally and respected, these days many things are respected only insofar as they satisfy human desires. Using things only as a means to gratify human desires is disrespectful and an example of the unbalanced actions that endanger the ecosystem and jeopardize human life. From the perspective of equality, the present ecocrisis is the result of unbalanced actions (kamma) in which human beings treat other beings inequitably. More generally, the present ecocrisis is the result of lives motivated by the three mental defilements: greed (rāga), hatred (dosa), and confusion (moha), and impure actions of the body (kāya), speech (vāci), and thought (manas). The current imbalance in the ecosystem is the result of not understanding the epistemological and ontological nondual relationship between human thoughts and actions and the world, and the result of not practicing their ethical nonduality.

According to the theory of kamma, the world arises in dependence upon the actions (kamma) of all beings. But humans are at the center of kamma. Human beings are interconnected with all other beings, which are limitless in number, and the kamma of all other beings is shared with humans, so from the perspective of human beings, we can say that the world is the result of “human” kamma.

According to early Buddhist texts, all sentient beings transmigrate in five realms of existence, in accordance with their wholesome or unwholesome actions. Among the beings of the five realms, only animals and human beings are visible agents of kamma, since we are not able to see the heavens, hells, or abodes of asuras. Plants such as the grasses and trees, which are included in the Hindu tradition, are excluded from the realms of transmigration in the Buddhist view. Non-sentient phenomena are not the subjects of kamma. As a matter of fact, neither are animals. Most early Buddhist texts, except for the later Jtakas influenced by Mahāyāna Buddhism, consider animals as passive beings that simply receive the results of their kamma. According to this view, only humans are the subjects of kamma. So, we can conclude that the world of ecocrisis is the result of human kamma.

In theory, the world is constructed and functions as a product of the kamma of all things that comprise this holistic world system, but from the perspective of human beings the world is an expression, result, and construct of human actions, or kamma. All other things in this integral world system exist not as subjects, but as objects influenced by human actions. So the words of the Buddha, “The world exists by kamma and humans exist by kamma,” can be interpreted from the perspective of human beings; the world perceived by humans is constructed by humans. This is why it can said that “our shared environment is the karmic result of the sum total of the thoughts and intentions that every human being projects outwardly in his or her own actions.”

Furthermore, human actions are led by the human mind and are an expression of mental activity. Thus, we can say that the world is an expression of the human mind. As we know, kamma is expressed through body, speech, and thought, and actions of body and speech arise from thought. What this means is that the actions of body and speech ultimately can be traced to the mind. So according to the Buddha, “The world is
led by the mind and dragged by the mind here and there.”7 In brief, we can say either that the world evolves from kamma or that the world evolves by the mind. Similarly, we can say that either the world of ecocrisis is the product of human actions or it is the product of the human mind.

Then, how does kamma/mind create the structure of the world? More specifically, what kamma/mind was responsible for the evolution of the ecocrisis in the world? The global ecocrisis has evolved from the three mental defilements – greed, hatred, and confusion – and impure actions of body, talk, and thought. To phrase this from the perspective of equality, the global ecocrisis has evolved from the disrespectful/unequal kamma/mentality of treating other beings unequally.

What needs to be done is simply to abandon the three mental defilements, maintain a state of mindfulness (sati), and clearly perceive the world of objects. In this way, one sees the world of dependent arising, emptiness, impermanence, and the middle path. This can also be understood as practicing purity of mind (citta visuddhi) and purity of action (kamma visuddhi).

The current ecocrisis arises from the three mental defilements as they are involved with the nondual process of interactions between mind and the world of objects. So, what is required for healing the global ecocrisis is to purify the mind and actions. From the perspective of equality, we can say that to purify the mind and actions is to practice the equality of respecting all beings with an attitude of abandoning self-centeredness or selfishness.

In this line of thinking, the prescription for the global ecocrisis is to comprehensively purify mind and actions. More specifically, it is to develop an attitude of equality that respects all beings and acts accordingly. This pure attitude of equality in thought and action is rooted in the nondual relationship between mind and objects that equally regards all beings in the evolution of the world: a nonduality that extends from the ontological and epistemological realm to the ethical realm.

**Practicing Equality as the Way of Healing**

Purifying the mind and actions is not something to be done just once, but must be practiced continuously. What is required is to habituate ourselves to pure thoughts and actions. If, as Stephanie Kaza says, “the root of the environmental crisis lies in the habits of mind as much as the destructive habits of behavior,”8 the root of ecohealth should be found in annihilating the three habitual mental defilements and purifying the habitual actions of body, speech, and thought. In brief, healing the ecocrisis is dependent on habituating ourselves to pure thoughts and actions.

The purification of thoughts and actions as the way to heal the ecocrisis can be expressed in different words: the 37 ways of practice, the Eight-fold Noble Path, the three trainings (sīla, samādhi, pañña), the liberation of mind and wisdom, and compassion and wisdom. Most specifically, from the perspective of practicing equality, the way to heal the ecocrisis is non-harm (abimśa), compassion (karunā), and loving kindness (mettā). Non-harm and compassion represent pure actions practicing equality, and loving kindness represents pure mind internalizing equality. Of course, all these are nondifferent, simply presenting different aspects of respecting all beings.

Compassion (karunā) means to care for every living being just as one cares for oneself. Compassion recognizes that the objects of compassion have the same wish to seek happiness and avoid suffering as oneself, and attempts to decrease living beings’ sufferings and increase their happiness. In practicing compassion, one adopts the principle of benefitting self and others, and utilizes spontaneous sympathy by identifying oneself with the objects to be cared for. The principle of benefitting both self and others through the practice of compassion is the ethically entailed necessity of dependent-arising, nonduality, and the holistic world system. In the structure of the holistic world system, all other beings are not separate from oneself but are extensions of oneself, so caring for other beings is equivalent to caring for oneself.
In the traditional understanding, compassion only applies to sentient beings. This is because only sentient beings have what compassion requires: the capacity to seek happiness and to avoid pain, and the capacity for sympathy. For example, sympathy for or identification with others as a mechanism for generating compassion at least requires “being sentient” to the object of compassion. Being sentient further means having the capacity to seek happiness and avoid pain, or the capacity to dislike death and suffering, and to desire life and pleasure.

How, then, can we explain the need to respect non-living beings, which are thought to be incapable of feeling pain and pleasure, and to have no capacity to generate sympathy? As I said earlier, we can admit that plants and non-living beings have “a desire for thriving” and “a projected desire” by extending and applying the sentient quality of animals. Consequently, we can apply the attitude of compassion to plants and non-living beings. As we know, the Buddha cared about trees and seeds and he asked his followers not to dig the earth carelessly. The reasons for caring about these things are not clearly addressed, but we can assume that the early Buddhists were aware that trees, grasses, the earth, and water contain tiny living creatures. In a word, the nature of animals as “being sentient” can be applied to plants and non-living things, which can be the objects of compassion just like animals.

As a matter of fact, even without extending and applying the sentient nature of animals, it is very clear that plants and non-sentient beings should be the objects of compassion. As we saw earlier, all things involved in “the process of the holistic life system” should be respected because there is no boundary between sentient and non-sentient things or between living and non-living beings in the earth’s mutually interrelated life system. In fact, compassion as an attitude of respect is not limited solely to animals. It is applied to all the beings – plants, animals, and non-living beings alike.

Non-harm (abimśā) is a passive way of practicing equality, whereas compassion is an active way of practicing non-harm by respecting all beings. Non-harm is passive because it is passively avoids actions that cause sufferings; compassion is active because it actively works to decrease suffering and increase happiness. However, compassion and non-harm are not two separate things. Compassion presupposes non-harm and non-harm ultimately aims at compassion. Compassion is the optimum practice of respect and non-harm is the minimum practice of respect.

If non-harm and compassion are ways of expressing respect for all beings, loving kindness (mettā) is the fundamental character of both. As we know, the famous Mettā Sutta asks us to have a boundless mind (appamān cetasā), a mind that wishes happiness to all living beings in all directions without forgetting for even a single moment. This sutta asks us to embody and internalize a mind of loving kindness, and does not explicitly ask us to express loving kindness in visible actions. When loving kindness becomes part of a person’s character, such a person is not capable of harming life or committing uncompassionate actions. A person with a mind of loving kindness cannot help but always be compassionate, regardless of the situation or what beings are involved. Such a person cannot fail to be compassionate, naturally will not generate inner conflicts, and will not even have to make intentional effort. It is not possible for such a person to hate, dislike, harm, or kill any being.

Loving kindness is not an action or norm that is fulfilled all at one time. Loving kindness flows from a person’s character, such that the person practicing it cannot endure what is not compassionate and feels harm as her/his own suffering. This is why loving kindness manifests constantly, regardless of the objects or conditions.

What is important is that non-harm, compassion, and loving kindness are not equivalent to a blind respect for all beings. They presuppose an understanding of the nature of life: the nonduality of myself and others, of humans and nature, of the mind and the world. These virtues equally benefit both oneself and other beings, and are a specific practice of equality that treats all other beings with the same attitude that I treat myself. To put it succinctly, this practice purifies the three defiled mind states – greed, hatred, and confusion – and purifies the three types of actions – of body, speech, and thought. In a word, it purifies the mind and actions. This is the essence of Buddhist ecology.
Conclusion

The Buddhist position on ecology is founded on the view that the world is a construct of human minds and actions. It is clear that not living a life of equality and not treating all beings with the same attitude as one treats oneself, as Buddhist ecology requires, are the causes of the present ecocrisis. To live a life of equality assumes an awareness of the mutual connectedness and interdependence of all the beings within the earth's holistic life system and understands the wish of all beings to seek happiness and avoid suffering. To live such a life means to set aside the egoistic self and to realize the eco-self that embodies the epistemological, ontological, and ethical nonduality of all the beings, and the virtues of non-harm, compassion, and loving kindness. To put this life in the simplest words, it is a life of pure mind and action.

NOTES

1. Saṃyutta Nikāya 5, p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 238.
5. Sutta Nipāta 654.
7. Saṃyutta Nikāya 1, p. 39.
10. Sutta-nipāta, pp. 149-51
Buddhist Nuns on Radio and Television: Disseminating Buddhism Through the Mass Media in Korea

Jinmyong Sunim

Right after attaining enlightenment the Buddha was hesitant to spread what he had realized to the world, but Brahma appeared from the heavens and successfully persuaded him to teach. The Buddha taught the Dharma to his five friends in the Deer Park in Sarnath. Although it is important to realize what the Buddha awakened to, it is also important to present the reasons why we should practice and realize his teachings. When the Buddha was in the Deer Park near Varanasi, he told his 60 disciples of the first Buddhist Council to go out and share the teachings. At that gathering of the disciples, he said:

Practitioners! I am liberated from the yoke of both heaven and the human world and so are you. Practitioners! Now is the time for you to liberate sentient beings. Go out into the world without delay in order to bring real benefits and comfort to people. Practitioners! On your journey, you should teach the Dharma as clearly as possible from the beginning to the end, while sympathizing with and embracing as many people as you can. In addition, you should become a whole person with integrity. Practitioners! Many living beings have only a few karmic obstructions and are little steeped in vice. Their foundation of goodness is sound because they are relatively free form evil passions. They are, however, suffering and in fear just because they have not had the opportunity to listen to the right teachings. Teach the Dharma to these people. Practitioners! I am also going to Uruvela to teach the Dharma.¹

After listening to these remarks, 60 disciples, including five Buddhist nuns, embarked on their journey to disseminate the Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha himself left for Uruvela. Now, well over 2,500 years have passed and humanity has witnessed significant changes in customs and culture, and in the way of learning and teaching the Buddha’s ideas. But this injunction to spread the Dharma is particularly needed for people living in this information age of the 21st century. Now material values are given priority over spiritual ones. Therefore who teaches and how to teach have become crucial for winning the hearts of people living today. It is also important to take full advantage of the fast changing mass media in spreading the Dharma. So, considering that most of the Buddhists in Korea are female, this paper takes a look at what Buddhist nuns on the Buddhist Broadcasting System (BBS) and BTN, a Buddhist Cable TV, are doing. This paper also reviews the need to use mass media in spreading the Buddha’s teachings and the problems associated with it.
Understanding the Mass Media

Most people today spend a lot of time using mass media. Except for the time during work and sleep, which are basic needs for survival, they spend most of the remaining time with the media. There are several reasons for this reality. The mass media allows us to have access to what is going on around ourselves and in the world and to share other cultures. It also plays a significant role in teaching our traditions, values, and norms and enables us to enjoy entertainment at home.

The mass media has both positive and negative effects. On the positive side, it provides information and plays an educational and guiding role as well as acting as a social coordinator. On the negative side, however, the mass media reduces human contact and simplifies human values, thus undermining cultural diversity. For sure, there is no form of mass media that does not have a downside to it. Skillful use of media will make propagation activities more effective, so we should keep this fact in mind and take full advantage of the media’s positive aspects.

Significance of the Foundation of BBS

The BBS was established on May 1, 1990, targeting audiences in Seoul and Gyunggi province under the motto, “The Sound of Enlightenment and Pleasure of Sharing.” This year marks its 14th anniversary. The BBS has continued to grow, although its history is short compared to other faith-based networks. As of 2004, BBS is headquartered in Seoul with bureaus in Busan, Gwangju, Daegu, Cheongju, and Chuncheon. The faith-based network also has three radio repeaters in Hongcheon, Andong, and Pohang. It has so far overcome a variety of hurdles and is steadily expanding its audience by arranging broadcasting time and programs in consideration of not only Buddhists but also other religious and secular people.

The BBS has merits and demerits that are different from other secular networks because it is faith-based. Therefore, it is important to adopt programming strategies that reflect the Buddhist ideas. Religious networks compete intensely to attract as many people as possible within a limited audience. Susan Tyler Eastman presents a programming strategy with five points:

1. **Compatibility.** This means that different types of shows should be scheduled to match the targeted audience’s daily lives. Programmers should adjust their program schedules in line with audiences’ changing activities during a 24-hour time period.
2. **Habit Formulation.** Scheduling programs for strict predictability establishes tuning habits that eventually become automatic. If programs are scheduled considering audiences’ daily lives, this will make it easier for their viewing habits to take hold.
3. **Control of Audience Flow.** Programming strategies should be formulated in a way that maximizes the flow of audience through to the next show and from other channels.
4. **Conservation of Program Resources.** Broadcasting tends to use up material for programs quickly. Shows that were once successful eventually move out of favor. The most important aspect of programming is getting the maximum mileage out of each program item and continuing to develop program formats.
5. **Breadth of Appeal.** Attracting as many different audiences as possible enables broadcasting networks to recover investment capital and cover operating costs. Programmers should identify what viewers really look for and formulate strategies accordingly.

These five elements for programming that were presented by Eastman are also relevant to BBS. Since BBS is faith-based and relies solely on listening, the radio network is required to draw up strategies for scrupulous
programming. BBS programming should be designed to propagate the Buddha’s teachings and encourage the practice of faith, while considering what the public looks for.

The lives of people today are changing rapidly. Under these circumstances, the foundation laid by BBS 14 years ago has brought the Buddha’s teachings closer to the public. BBS also plays a key role in promoting education about nontraditional Buddhist doctrine and practice. In addition, the religious network has set forth guidelines for the practice of faith.

**Programming of BBS for the 2004 Spring Season**


**Shows Hosted by Buddhist Nuns**

Buddhist monks are expected to host the shows about spreading Buddhism and promoting the practice of faith. In reality, however, they only host a small number of shows in comparison to Taiwan, which has several broadcasting channels devoted to propagating Buddhism. Cases in point are programs on a network operated by Faguangshan and one operated by Master Chengyen, the leader of Tzu-Chi (Compassion Relief) Foundation. These two networks educate Buddhists and carry out Dharma propagation and social work through a variety of programs. This is very different from the situation in Korea where there is much room for improvement in promoting Buddhism using the mass media.

If you look at the shows hosted or co-hosted by Buddhist nuns, you will learn that they play a significant role in bringing Buddhism closer to listeners through the mass media. For example, “Counseling on Practice of Faith” is a show where listeners can ask three Buddhist monastics questions about Buddhist doctrine and the practice of faith. One of the three monastics is a Buddhist nun. Since 80 percent of the Buddhists in Korea are female, the dedicated counseling offered by this Buddhist nun has attracted a variety of listeners, ranging from Buddhist beginners to those who study the sūtras.

“Melody with a Cup of Tea” is a well known program that embraces followers of other religions without any prejudice. This is one of the few shows that has continued to increase ratings since the foundation of BBS. A Buddhist nun hosted this show at the time BBS was established. For most of the time since then, other Buddhist nuns have taken over the show even though the host was once replaced by lay female announcers. Listeners who tune into this show need to have a deep understanding of western classical music. The show uses peaceful and popular classical music to make the Buddha’s teachings naturally sink into the listeners. It also helps listeners open their minds, making it easier for them to practice the Buddha’s teachings in daily life and to find Seon masters around them. Listeners can encounter first-hand experiences about practice from Buddhist monks and heartwarming stories of ordinary people. This show enables them to calm the anger and greed that otherwise grow incessantly, but disappear while listening to music. It also delivers hope, in that people can overcome a sense of despair and deprivation. As a result, this show helps
give peace of mind. By tuning into the show, listeners will find warmth in their eyes and gentleness in their speech and behavior. It may seem that a combination of Buddhism, western classical music, and a Buddhist monastic as a host seems rather strange, but this novelty creates a comfortable environment where listeners can open their hearts.

“Holy Meeting” is a show that embraces the disadvantaged through the compassion of the Buddha. At the beginning, this program used to be just a special Friday program on “Melody with a Cup of Tea,” extending a helping hand to needy people. With its growing role, the show has been extended to a one-hour spot on Friday. This show plays an essential part on the faith-based networks, because the channel is required to make society a better place to live in. A large number of listeners have been attracted to the show, which has aired hundreds of episodes. In the episodes many needy people have shared their stories of hardship and suffering with listeners. The Buddhist nun who hosts the show gives very thoughtful and attentive consideration to the listeners.

Another show hosted by a Buddhist nun is “Lumbini Garden,” which targets children. The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the largest Buddhist sect in the country, has found that youth are their smallest listening age group. This reality demonstrates the importance of the children’s show in nurturing future generations of Korean Buddhist practitioners. The current host, who is also a professional radio show host, uses oral narration to lead the show. She is the right person to host it, because she also runs a kindergarten affiliated with a Buddhist temple.

As of June 2004, the Buddhist nuns mentioned above are still carrying out their propagation activities through the BBS. In addition, Buddhist nuns offer lectures on Buddhist doctrine and texts on other educational shows. These shows are not hosted by Buddhist nuns, but feature different Buddhist monks selected on the basis of the texts they lecture on.

In sum, there are only four Buddhist nuns who host BBS radio shows. Even if we add those nuns who appear on radio shows periodically, that is a total of only six Buddhist nuns on the BBS. Given this reality, the role of Buddhist nuns on radio shows overall is minimal.

The Emergence of BTN

Buddhist Television Network (BTN) made its debut and aired its first broadcast on March 1, 1995, at a time before Buddhists living in this age of mass media began tuning in. BTN was established with the objective of proclaiming the sound of the Dharma far and wide through visual footage, preparing the Buddhist community for the information age, leading the way in promoting a sound broadcasting culture, spreading the true Dharma around the world, putting a human face to its shows, making society healthier, and enriching culture.

The Buddhist cable network got off to a good start. BTN secured enough capital by encouraging Buddhist temples and groups and Buddhists across the country to file for its initial public offering. However, BTN has failed to identify a professional CEO in the Buddhist community and has had financial difficulties since then. Consequently, the Buddhist TV network has failed to live up to the expectations of many Buddhists who filed for the IPO. Currently, BTN barely manages to stay in business.

BTN has tried hard to satisfy the intellectual interests of viewers by offering a variety of programs. BTN has its limits as a cable TV network, however. Still, it can be argued that cable TV networks are freer from government intervention and public scrutiny than over-the-air networks. Over-the-air networks are under heavy supervision, because they use airwaves which are a public asset.4

Programming on BTN

The programs aired on BTN include Buddhist teaching programs, educational programs, cultural

BTN offers a variety of programs in line with its founding spirit of spreading the Buddha’s teachings far and wide. However, it is regrettable that only a few Buddhist nuns are engaged in these programs. Some Buddhist nuns who teach at Unmun Sangha College, Dongguk University, and Joong Ang Sangha University have appeared on BTN shows but, unfortunately, most of the shows are dominated by Buddhist monks. In the early days of BTN, a Buddhist nun hosted a Buddhist cuisine show which posted high ratings. Another Buddhist nun hosted a children’s show for a while.

Programs That Buddhists Monastics Are Best Suited to Host

A close look at the programs on BBS and BTN indicates that there are a number shows that Buddhist monastics can be best suited to host, such as shows on sutra lectures, Buddhist doctrine lectures, practice of the faith, counseling, practice, meditation, and teaching children and youth. In reality, only a small number of Buddhist monks are hosting such shows.

There are several reasons behind the lack of activity of Buddhist monastics on mass media. First, renunciants of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism focus on practice. Their practice based on Gahn-hwa Seon makes them reluctant to appear on TV or radio shows for spreading and educating the Buddha’s teachings.

Second, there are few training programs designed to help Buddhists monks to develop the expertise and skills necessary to host a show. Even if a Buddhist monastic has specialized knowledge in a specific area, he or she would not be able to deliver his or her message to the audience effectively without expertise on broadcasting. This highlights the need for training programs for Buddhist monastics.

Third, Buddhist practitioners have a lack of interest in and understanding of the broadcasting media. Most of them find mass media irrelevant to practice. Given this lack of understanding it is essential to help them recognize the benefits of the broadcasting media in conducting missionary work.

In some sense, the limitations I have mentioned can be attributed to structural problems in Buddhist associations in Korea. Complacency in the Korean Buddhist community is also to blame, leading to a failure to prepare for the future.

Conclusion

Today, many female Buddhists are playing an active role in Korean Buddhism unlike in the past. Notably, Buddhist nuns who used to focus on practice living in temples are expanding their roles in Dharma
propagation and social work. They are increasingly taking a proactive attitude. Practice and propagation are like the two sides of the same coin. In other words, the two activities can reinforce each other.

Buddhist associations are required to make their personnel management more efficient by identifying monastics’ individual skills and assigning them to the right posts. Many of them say that they are disinclined to carry out propagation work through the broadcasting media, not because they lack expertise and skills, but because Buddhist associations and the temples they belong to do not support their livelihood.

There is a saying that the post one holds will define one’s competence later. No one can be competent from the beginning. There is nothing perfect in the world. Before attaining enlightenment we are in the process of becoming a person of character like the Buddha who is emancipated and wise. Likewise, it takes a lot of time and money to nurture an expert in a specific area. This is what both Buddhist associations and monastics should keep in mind.

It is beyond our ability to predict the future several thousand years ahead as the Buddha did. It is, however, a duty for the whole Buddhist community to join forces in preparing for Buddhism a hundred years from now. Never forget that once you learn what the problem is the answer will soon be forthcoming.

NOTES


When Legal Norms and Buddhist Practices Collide: Australian Lessons in Dealing with Differences

Diana Cousens

In February 2004, I joined a convoy of 500 Vietnamese people in eleven buses for an all-day tour across Melbourne, visiting eight Buddhist temples that are large enough to accommodate 500 visitors in one sitting. All of these temples were built in the last ten to fifteen years, though some had predecessor temples that were older than that. The temples belonged to the Cambodian, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Vietnamese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. The tour is an annual event that commemorates the Vietnamese/Chinese New Year.

The New Year tour celebrates the strength of Buddhist identity in Melbourne and the cross-ethnic nature of that identity. In Australia, any tensions between different groups, for example, between the Cambodians and Vietnamese or the Tibetans and Chinese or the Mahāyāna and Theravāda, is irrelevant. We are all Buddhists and that is enough.

Such a non-sectarian approach to Buddhism is possible because most Buddhists in Australia are immigrants in a new country or newly converted Anglo-Australians. It is more important to find points of common interest and concern than to worry about lingering rivalries from centuries past. The establishment of Buddhist temples is the most visible sign of the recent establishment of the Dharma in a new land. Temples that are able to accommodate 500 visitors must cost well over a million Australian dollars, perhaps several million. The temples represent a major commitment from communities often largely composed of immigrants, many of whom are newly arrived. Most immigrants from Indochina, for example, arrived as refugees less than 30 years ago.

Temple building is admittedly very important, but the focus of my paper is on other, perhaps less obvious ways of ensuring that Buddhist religious practice is possible. As citizens of a country, we must engage with the rest of society – the courts, hospitals, prisons, schools, universities, and workplaces. Situations may arise in these contexts that require the special characteristics of a Buddhist approach. There have been occasions of major disagreement between Buddhist practice and the norms set forth in Australian law.

Multicultural Oaths and Affirmations

For example, in the Australian courts, people are given a choice of swearing to tell the truth on the Christian Bible or making an affirmation. In 2002 the State Government of Victoria undertook an “Inquiry into Oaths and Affirmations with Reference to the Multicultural Community.” Two other members of the Buddhist Council of Victoria and I appeared before the Inquiry as expert witnesses. Past practice in the courts had seen an uneven availability of the non-Christian affirmation. Some communities were able to swear on a holy book other than the Bible. During the Inquiry, the Islamic Council declared that it was inappropriate for Muslims to swear on the Qur’an and we contended that it would be preferable not to swear on a Buddhist book.
The courtroom is a secular environment and in a Buddhist context religious oaths are usually done in conjunction with a religious practice. It seems that the attempt to find a “holy book” alternative to the Bible for non-Christians has been undertaken to accommodate past court practice and the expectations of court officials. These practices and expectations have been accommodated for the sake of simplicity and to avoid the need for justification and explanation.\(^2\) In our case, we contended Buddhists do not have a practice of swearing on statues or texts.\(^3\) Furthermore, there is no one Buddhist book that should be used in court, because Buddhist sacred texts vary both within and among Buddhist countries, not to mention complex issues of language. We proposed that the Buddhist oath should make reference to the commitment to refrain from lying, not to the Buddha. In a secular environment, we proposed that the Buddhist oath should be very simple. Our suggestion was, “In accordance with the Buddhist precept of truthful speech and mindful of the consequences of false speech, I (name), do solemnly, sincerely, and truly declare that I will tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

The Inquiry was also considering the proposition that the courts present only one non-religious oath for everyone. We contended that it would be more appropriate for different kinds of oaths to be made available to different kinds of people. For those who believe in God, for example, it is more evocative to include a reference to God. For Buddhists and other nontheists, such a reference is best omitted. We were pleased to see that a recommendation of the Inquiry was that legally binding oaths be in accordance with different religious beliefs and practices, and that the court should make available a list of oaths which are considered acceptable.\(^4\)

As Buddhists in Australia, we are given opportunities to look at and change customary practice in many contexts, such as in this case in the courtroom. Customary practice in any society is often invisible, because it is considered “normal.” Australia had a large Chinese Buddhist community during the gold rush in the mid-nineteenth century, but Buddhists had nearly disappeared until the influx of Asian migration that took place from the 1970s. The discovery of Buddhism by Anglo-Celtic Buddhists dates to about the same period. Therefore, public institutions have largely been informed by a Christian, European, usually British, sensibility. Acceptance of the idea of Australia as a multicultural society – an idea that has gained momentum over the last 30 years – has provided an opportunity to change customary practice.

**ACT Coroner’s Act versus the Requirements of Practice**

There have been some significant occasions when the law, Australian customary practice and Buddhist sensibilities have been at odds. The most startling of these occasions arose in 1993 as a result of the death of a Tibetan Sakyapa lama, Gyalsay Rinpoche, in Canberra, Australia’s capital city. On the night before his death, he gave a Medicine Buddha empowerment. Prior to that, he had complained of a severe headache for several weeks. During the night a blood vessel burst in his brain and he died of a stroke. In the morning he was found dead in his bed by his students. There were no other Tibetan lamas in Canberra at that moment. The students were shocked and, feeling at a loss, called the ambulance in the hope that he might be revived. They also contacted the head of the Sakya tradition, His Holiness Sakya Trizin. His Holiness’ advice was that the body should not be moved, that certain prayers should be performed in the presence of the deceased, and that an autopsy should be avoided.

Meanwhile the ambulance arrived and the students notified the police that they wished to complete the prayers before the body was taken away. The police showed some patience and negotiated the removal of the body with the students. After a few hours, two lamas came from Sydney and performed further prayers in front of Gyalsay Rinpoche’s body at the morgue. The lamas reassured the students that Rinpoche had died of a “wind stroke,” and that his consciousness had left the body straight away. Therefore, they said, it would not be disruptive to perform an autopsy, even thought the head of the Sakya tradition had said it was preferable to avoid an autopsy. The students met with the Attorney General, the coroner, the doctor
scheduled to perform the autopsy, representatives from the Office of Tibet, and Rinpoche’s own doctor. The law required an autopsy but it could be limited to Rinpoche’s head. The Attorney General also said the law could be changed. Later that day he announced that an inquiry would be held into the Australian Capital Territory Coroner’s Act. The body was embalmed, with students performing Buddhist prayers in the funeral parlor during the embalming. The body was then flown back to Rinpoche’s monastery in India for burial.5

This episode came as a shock to the whole Australian Buddhist community. We had no preparation for the death of a lama. Australian law and customary practice did not favor a Buddhist point of view or Tibetan cultural expectations. The key Buddhist concerns were not to move the body, to provide an opportunity for religious practice, and to avoid an autopsy. Other concerns were that primacy be given to the preferences of Buddhist spiritual leaders, such as the head of the Sakya tradition and the lamas who came from Sydney. Australian law gives rights to family members, whereas from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective the responsibility for ensuring appropriate practice lies with religious authorities. In the case of the death of a Buddhist monk or a nun who has left the household life, family members may be fairly peripheral in the scheme of things. There is a parallel in Australia, in that exceptions are given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, among whom custom and tradition may also give responsibility to a person outside the family. Another consideration is that many Australians also have spiritual beliefs which are not shared by their family members.

The Inquiry into the Coroner’s Act resulted in amendments that reflect some of these concerns that were put into effect in 1997. In determining whether the coroner should order an autopsy or the removal of a body, the statute now reads that the Coroner may “have regard to the desirability of minimizing the causing of distress or offence to persons who, because of their cultural attitudes or spiritual beliefs, could reasonably be expected to be distressed or offended.” This is a big step forward, but an awareness of the importance of spiritual authority for Buddhists at the time of death remains unlegislated.

Developing Buddhist Care for the Dying

My discussions with friends in Canberra who played a part in managing the death of Gyalsay Tulku and changing the law there, and my role on the Buddhist Council of Victoria, inspired me to develop a small publication that would assist Buddhists at the time of death.7 The result of this was the booklet, Buddhist Care for the Dying. Because of Australia’s multi-ethnic Buddhist community – reflected in the many kinds of large temples already mentioned – it seemed a good idea to ask the major Buddhist communities for advice about appropriate procedures at the time of death. I formulated a simple questionnaire that asked the following questions:

- In your tradition, when a person knows they are going to die, is there any particular method of preparation that will help them?
- In your tradition, what are good things to do around or for a dying person?
- What are things to avoid doing around a dying person?
- Are there any particular rituals, ceremonies, or procedures that dying people must do or have done for them before they die?
- Can you please tell us any particular prayers or mantras that a dying person should repeat or have repeated in his or her presence?
- Is it helpful or disruptive to the dying person to have relatives present at the time of death?
- Is there any particular way that the body should be handled or treated after death? (Such as a period of not touching it or not touching particular parts of the body?)
- Is it acceptable in your tradition to have an autopsy conducted if there is some uncertainty as to the cause of death?
• Is it acceptable to use parts of the body for organ donation?
• What is your preferred method of disposal of the body?
• What is the most beneficial thing to do for a person after they have died?

The answers to these questions from members of different Theravāda groups overlapped, so a separate Theravāda section was compiled. Among the Mahāyāna respondents, who were Japanese, Chinese, Tibetan, and Vietnamese, we found a wide range of responses. It seemed advisable to respect the differences and include each of these answers separately. The sponsor of the publication was the Yung Yang Temple, a Taiwanese Chinese temple in Narre Warren, a suburb of Melbourne. The temple’s abbot suggested that the Chinese and Vietnamese sections of the booklet be translated into those languages. At a fairly late stage in the booklet’s development, the chair of the Buddhist Council of Victoria and I visited the chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission who agreed to fund 2000 copies of the booklet and distribute it to every ward in every hospital, prison, nursing home, medical teaching establishment, and welfare office in the state of Victoria. The largest cemetery in Victoria, the Necropolis, distributed 250 booklets to all the funeral directors in metropolitan Melbourne. The Necropolis is simultaneously developing a large Chinese Buddhist section of the cemetery, with landscaping done in accordance with Feng Shui principles.

So questions may be asked: How does the advice in the booklet differ from Australian customary practice? In what sense will it change behavior in a hospital? How will it help caregivers of Buddhists who may not be Buddhist or who may have a vague family affiliation with Buddhism without much depth of understanding?

An implicit assumption in all the advice offered was that the dying person is preparing for the next life. There was a shared emphasis among all respondents about the importance of maintaining a peaceful environment, of not fighting or crying, of creating a spiritual atmosphere through the repetition of mantras, prayers, or guided visualizations. The Vietnamese interviewee, Ven. Thich Phuoc Tan, counseled that the time approaching death was a time to repent, purify the mind, and affirm the practice of going for refuge in the Triple Gem. He advised playing tapes of chanting and placing an image of the Buddha in front of the dying person. The Chinese recommended doing good deeds on behalf of the dying person and transferring the merit. These recommendations represent a rather complex process of preparation, in contrast perhaps to a medical emphasis on minimizing pain. Most Buddhists in Australia are ethnically Vietnamese or Chinese. To another question, the Chinese interviewee said that a dying person should not be resuscitated and should not be moved for eight to ten hours after death. Both of these recommendations differ from ordinary hospital practice.

The booklet emphasizes the assistance that can be given by a monk or a nun. It poses the question: Is it helpful or disruptive to the dying person to have relatives present at the time of death? This question does not assume the primacy of family relations and answers to the question varied. The Tibetans answered, “At the point of death, seeing relatives may be upsetting.” The Vietnamese answered more indirectly, “Do not do anything that may cause anger to arise.” Theravādin Buddhists advised that the person should be consulted on this point ahead of time, but, in any case, family members should not upset the dying person.

As a practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism, it is my understanding that organ donation is something to be avoided, because pain and other emotions may be experienced even after clinical death. I was surprised to find, however, that most Buddhist traditions are not disquieted over the prospect of organ donation. The Tibetan informant simply offered, “No comment.” Perhaps this was a skillful answer, since there is great deal of debate about this topic and reasons can be given to support both sides of the question. The Chinese answer was more precise, “Normally organ donation happens as soon as the person passes away or is just about to pass away, so unless the person has a very strong will to overcome the physical pain, it is suggested to avoid organ donation.” However, responses from the Theravādin, Vietnamese, and Japanese communities all endorsed organ donation, assuming the donor agrees. I wonder whether organ donation
would be acceptable to those who are concerned about the possibility of pain after brain death if the person was anesthetized, since normally there is no perception of the body under anaesthesia. However, normal medical practice would not assume a need for anesthesia in the case of a person determined to be clinically dead.

All the Buddhists consulted treated the issue of autopsy as a matter for the law. The Tibetan informant added the proviso: “[It] does not matter once the person is definitely dead,” while the Chinese informant added, “It should be avoided in the first eight to ten hours after death.” The issue of determining the time of death is perhaps key to refining this debate. The Tibetan point of view is that a person is not really dead until the body begins to decompose, which is evident when the body begins to smell.

Another idea implicit in the booklet is that a deceased person still has significant needs. This does not accord with Australian customary practice; even the reformed ACT Coroner’s Act was primarily concerned with minimizing distress to survivors. All of the advisors for the booklet recommended that some form of meritorious activity be performed on behalf of the deceased after death. Theravādins recommended that donations be made to monks and charities in the name of the deceased and all the Mahāyānists recommended 49 days of prayers and additional practices, such as observing a vegetarian diet, giving donations to charity and religious groups, releasing animals, and planting trees. A unique idea was offered by the Japanese informant, who explained that wealthy people hold memorial services with their family and a Buddhist priest annually or every five years, for up to 50 years. He also commented:

> It looks like these ceremonies are for the deceased, but in fact they are for the people who have survived. If all the family and people who are connected to the person come together and have a dinner together than it means that everything is going well and peace is maintained. A memorial brings the past and the present together and gives a chance for some reflection. If there has been a misfortune then people can come together and be reconciled. It reduces the karma of the deceased person.

Gathering for memorial services is considered beneficial to both the deceased and their survivors.

The bulk of the advice in the booklet is very practical. I avoided any emphasis on the esoteric dimensions of Buddhist practice. The booklet is aimed at caregivers, not practitioners in retreat. Serious practitioners know that the time of death may provide an unparalleled opportunity for meditation on the nature of mind, since many of the distractions and confusion of bodily experience are absent. However, most Buddhists are not highly advanced meditators. In a society that does not discuss death freely, openly, or often, it is perhaps useful to begin the discussion on a practical level. One of the aims of the booklet is to begin the conversation, to face this most difficult issue, and to ask how we can do things better.

When the booklet was launched, Dr. Ian Gawler, who wrote the foreword, spoke about the death of his mother when he was a teenager. He said that if anyone wanted to write a book about how to handle death badly, he or she could just follow what happened in his family. The loss was not discussed and everybody was just expected to get over it.

The booklet does not talk about how to manage grief and loss, but perhaps by learning to provide better care for the dying, those who remain behind will not be haunted by anxieties about all the things they should have done, but didn’t. A large proportion of people born in Australia are born to parents from other countries. Many of these people do not remember traditional cultural practices related to dying because, as the second generation, they have assimilated into the mainstream. Those of us who have become Buddhist by choice are still very much in the process of learning.

A week after the booklet was launched, Daniel Andrews, the MP who launched it, announced in Parliament, “This valuable resource is an important recognition that in order to treat someone with dignity, we need to understand and respect that which is of value to them. The booklet will help us meet
that important challenge.” He described the booklet as a “valuable resource in the provision of culturally appropriate health-care in Victoria.”

Conclusion

Perhaps another way of seeing all this is that bringing the Dharma to the West requires many strategies. The Buddhist Council of Victoria recently joined with the Buddhist Councils of New South Wales and Queensland to establish the Federation of Australian Buddhist Councils (FABC). The establishment of this Federation is a way of creating a national umbrella body that can represent Buddhist interests to the Australian Federal Government, although thus far the FABC has not received that level of recognition. Surprisingly, one of the first things Buddhists need in order to be officially recognized as a religion in Australia is a wedding ceremony, so one of the first actions of the FABC was to create a wedding ceremony. Perhaps marriage is not one of Buddhism’s defining features. Nevertheless, in order to fit into the Australian cultural understanding of religion, such a ceremony is required.

Buddhism in Australia is at a very early stage and we still have a long way to go. Buddhists need beautiful temples, inspirational stupas, impressive art work, translations, and collections of texts. We need facilities to seriously study our various scriptures, so that we can have an enlightened and educated understanding of the Dharma. We need opportunities for meditation and retreat. We also need to work together with other Buddhists and with established institutions in the larger society to find ways to include Buddhist understandings, and to reform institutions and practices which do not meet Buddhist needs.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 83.
3. Ibid., p. 81.
4. Ibid., p. xx.
6. Australian Capital Territory Coroner’s Act, Sec. 28. Quoted in Ibid., p. 6.
Buddhist Women’s Contributions in the West

Karuna Dharma

I am not an expert on what women Buddhists are doing all around the globe, so I will focus on the contributions American women have made. Even here, my knowledge is limited. All I can report on is what I know. I am sure that I have left out many worthy contributions made by women and hope you will forgive me for that.

First, I would like to say that I see many more contributions in the last ten years by women, both lay and ordained, around the world. I would like to mention two Theravadin women who took bhikkhuni ordination in Sri Lanka, where there is still considerable resistance to reestablishing the bhikkhuni order. One is Bhikkhunī Dhammananda, formerly known as Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, who taught at Thammasat University in Bangkok and worked for years in the field of ecology and the environment. The other is Bhikkhunī Kusuma of Sri Lanka, a woman who very actively supported Buddhist women and nuns and became ordained a few years ago. Both of these women are carrying the Dharma around the world with great success. There are so many other women in Taiwan, Vietnam, and Korea who are also doing invaluable work.

Probably the most significant contributions made by women in the United States are in the field of education. The first person who comes to mind here is Anne Klein, who got a Masters degree at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. Anne Klein has been a professor of religious studies at Rice University since 1995 and was department chair from 1995 to 1998. She was acting assistant professor of religious studies at Stanford University from 1986 to 1989 and in 1994-95 received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a project titled “Bon and the Logic of the Nonconceptual: Study and Translation of a 10th-Century Tibetan Religious Text.” She was the recipient of a Ford Foundation grant for a multi-faceted project entitled “Gender, Self, and Well-Being: Traditional Buddhism, and Modern Western Culture, A Living Dialogue.” She is also founding director of Dawn Mountain – a Tibetan temple, community center, and research institute in Houston, Texas. In addition to teaching there, she travels to teach “Buddhism in the Body” programs, linking traditional Tibetan practice with body-centered energy awareness. Her two most recent books are Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists and the Art of the Self, and Path to the Middle: Oral Madhyamika Philosophy in Tibet. Her other publications include: Knowing, Naming, and Negation: A Sourcebook on Tibetan Sautrantika; and Knowledge and Liberation: Tibetan Buddhist Epistemology in Support of Transformative Religious Experience. Clearly, Prof. Klein’s intellect and publications are of the highest calibre.

The next person who comes to mind is Rita Gross, a professor at University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She authored Buddhism after Patriarchy, Feminism and Religion: An Introduction, a book that catapulted her into immediate success as an author and thinker. She also wrote Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues. She has appeared at many conferences on Buddhism and is highly respected for her stance on gender issues in Buddhism.

Then we come to the president of Sakyadhita, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, who is an assistant professor
at the University of San Diego, an excellent Catholic school, where she teaches courses on Buddhism and prepares students to live in a pluralistic society. Recently I was enjoying a cappuccino with an elderly Catholic priest friend of mine. We got into a conversation about the University of San Diego. I said to him, I have a friend, a woman ordained in the Tibetan tradition who teaches at USD. He asked, “UCSD (University of California at San Diego) or USD?” And I replied, “USD. She teaches Buddhism there.” He replied, “Really? At a Catholic school? Good for her.”

But, education is not only in the universities. I would like to tell you a little about female Buddhist teachers in American temples and monasteries, the many female masters and Buddhist teachers in our temples and Buddhist schools. I remember Dr. Judith Brown, the past director of Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado and Ven. Dr. Yifa, who was director of Hsi Lai University in Southern California.

Ven. Pema Chodron met her root guru, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in February 1972. She began her Buddhist studies under Lama Chime, who encouraged her to work with Trungpa Rinpoche. Ultimately she made her most profound connection with Trungpa Rinpoche, studying with him from 1973 until his death in 1987. At the request of His Holiness the Karmapa, she received bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Chinese lineage in 1981 in Hong Kong. Pema Chodron was previously the director of Karma Dzong in Boulder, Colorado. She now lives at Gampo Abbey, a monastic center where both men and women practice, situated on 200 acres of ocean-front land in the Cape Breton highlands of Nova Scotia, Canada. Founded in 1984, Gampo Abbey is part of the Vajradhatu Association of Buddhist Churches. Pema Chodron was formerly the director and is now the principal teacher at Gampo Abbey. When she is not in strict retreat and can take time off from her abbey duties, Pema Chodron travels extensively, teaching at many contemplative centers throughout Europe and North America. Ven. Pema Chodron is very interested in aiding the development of the Buddhist monastic tradition in the West, and is drawn in particular to the extraordinary richness and wisdom found in the Tibetan monastic tradition. She is the author of *Wisdom of No Escape* and *Start Where You Are*. One of her best known books is *When Things Fall Apart*. She is a very popular author, who writes in understandable English from her own experience.

Another Buddhist nun who played an important role as a teacher and made many innovations is Ven. Ayya Kema, who was born in Germany, married an American, and reared two children in the U.S. In 1978 she established Wat Buddha Dhamma, a forest monastery in the Theravāda tradition, near Sydney, Australia. In Colombo she set up the International Buddhist Women’s Center as a training center for Sri Lankan nuns and Parappuduwa Nuns’ Island for women to practice intensively and/or ordain as nuns. She was the spiritual director of Buddha Haus in Germany, which was established in 1989 under her auspices.

There are also many lay women teachers in the West, particularly in the United States. I will mention only a few of them. Ruth Denison, a woman born in Germany who is not ordained, is the founder and director of Dhammadina, a successful Theravādin meditation center in the Mojave Desert of Southern California. Ruth has attracted both men and women students and has updated mindfulness meditation to include body movement meditation.

Charlotte Joko Beck who is a Dharma successor to Taizan Maezumi Roshi, of Zen Center of Los Angeles has her own Zen center in San Diego. Jan Chozen Bays, another successor to Maezumi Roshi, is the abbot of Great Vow Zen Monastery in Oregon and works as a pediatrician as well. Ven. Jiyu Kennett Roshi was a well-known Zen master at Shasta Abbey at Mount Shasta, California, which she founded and mentored until her death a few years ago. She ordained both men and women as Zen monks. Today there are about 60 celibate Zen priests, both male and female, living at Shasta Abbey.

Ven. Gesshin Prabhāsa Dharma was an artist who began studying with Sasaki Joshu Roshi in the 1960s at Cimarron Zen Center in Los Angeles. In 1983, disillusioned with Sasaki Joshu, she turned to Vietnamese Zen. She was recognized as a Zen Roshi by Ven. Thich Man-Giac at the Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles. Ven. Gesshin established International Zen Institute, which has branches in the U.S., Germany, and the Netherlands, carried on by her ordained disciples.
Of course, I cannot forget Egyoko Sensei, now the leader of Zen Center of Los Angeles (ZCLA), just a mile from my temple. Rev. Egyoku is instituting many changes at ZCLA, making it consistent with contemporary American culture. For instance, it has an active gay group, both men and women. Also, when people take refuge, they no longer take Japanese names, but are given names in English.

Sharon Salzburg, Toni Packer, Maurine Stuart, Bobby Rhodes, Joanna Macy, Sonja Margulies, Yvonne Rand, and Jacqueline Mandell are all American laywomen who take active roles as Buddhist meditation teachers. These teachers are all featured in Lenore Friedman’s book *Meetings With Remarkable Women*. I suppose I should not leave myself out of this list of remarkable teachers. I have been abbess of the International Buddhist Meditation Center (IBMC) since the death of my master, Ven. Dr. Thich Thien-An, a well known Vietnamese Zen master who was close childhood friends with Thich Nhat Hanh. Since Ven. Thich Thien-An’s death, I have been carrying on the duties of the center in the tradition which my master laid down.

Our temple was the first in the United States to give *bhikkhu* ordination in 1974 and the first to give *bhikkhuni* ordination in 1976, making me the first American woman to take *bhikkhuni* vows in the United States. Ven. Thich Thien-An introduced an additional ordination as a Zen Dharma teacher. This ordination compares to the Japanese Zen tradition. So, a person taking full ordination at IBMC has the choice of taking the traditional *bhikkhu/bhikkhuni* ordination or Zen ordination. These ordinations are on the same level. The candidates receive the same training as the *bhikkhus*, except for Vinaya studies, and are ordained in the same ceremony.

After I became abbess at IBMC, we made further changes. In 1981, under the aegis of Ven. Thich Man-Giac, the ceremony was done completely in English, making it the first time the traditional ceremony was done in English. In 1994, for the first time, a woman presided over the ceremony, as the upādhyāyika, or ordaining master, along with her male counterpart, the late Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara. Not only did Saṅgha members from many different traditions come together and participate in the ordination ceremony – Zen, Theravāda, general Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, and Pure Land – but we also ordained people of all traditions, in English. Ven. Ratanasara and I felt that we were ordaining people in the Saṅgha, not a particular tradition. We ordained people from Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions all together. The traditional ceremony was split in half, with the women playing roles equal to those of men. This was certainly a first. We performed our second grand ordination in 1996 and will be giving a third grand ordination in December this year.

The biggest difference between this grand ordination and the earlier ones is that I will be giving ordination to openly gay people as Dharma teachers. In the United States, Buddhist people do not have to hide their sexual orientation. In Buddhism, there is no room for bias on the basis of race, culture, or gender. When one becomes enlightened, there is no gender involved. Likewise, Buddhism has no room for bias regarding sexual orientation. I am afraid, however, that this issue remains even more controversial than gender. But we are making progress in this area.

I have been active in both Buddhist and interreligious affairs in the U.S. I was a founding figure in several temples, the Buddhist Saṅgha Council of Southern California, the College of Oriental Studies, the College of Buddhist Studies, the American Buddhist Congress, and Sakyadhita. My latest project is prison work. There are a number of women, both lay and ordained, like Ven. Robin Courtin and Rev. Ksanti, who go into the prisons to teach Dharma and meditation. I do not visit prisons, but 60 prisoners are currently studying with me and we send out literature to another 400 prisoners every other month. All of my students write to at least two prisoners as well.

I would like to end by saying that women are making huge contributions to Buddhism in the United States, changing the way people look at themselves and others. We offer an alternative to male-dominated teaching institutions and temples. And we have become enormously popular among men as well as women. I want to add one last word here. Women must rise up and take responsibility. For, we will not have equality with men until women have male students as well as female ones and are leaders of temples and monasteries.
Buddhist Women as Leaders and Teachers: Gender Bias and Democratization

*Rita M. Gross*

One of the primary feminist criticisms of Buddhism has been the extent to which men occupy most or all roles of leadership and teaching authority. At one level, the solution would seem to be obvious: take measures to ensure that women are capable of taking on those roles, and then make sure that women are promoted to the positions for which they are qualified.

However, many feminists have proposed a different solution, questioning whether the hierarchical social organizations that have characterized Buddhism for centuries are necessary or worth preserving. Just as many Christian women have stated that they have no desire to be priests in a church that has not been transformed from a hierarchical organization into an egalitarian one, so some Buddhists have argued that hierarchy itself is a patriarchal phenomenon and cannot be redeemed by allowing or encouraging women to take up these positions. Many Westerners are deeply suspicious of the authority a Vajrayana or a Zen Dharma teacher has over his or her students, and of the devotion and loyalty to the teacher that is encouraged in students. Especially after the scandals over various kinds of abuse of power that rocked North American Buddhism in the 1980’s, suspicions about almost unlimited hierarchical power increased. Most North American Buddhist organizations have reconsidered how much authority they were willing to concede to their teachers and leaders and what aspects of their communal and spiritual lives they were willing to let teachers supervise. Along with the push for women’s equal participation in Buddhism, many observers of Western Buddhism regard a growing demand for democracy in Buddhist institutions to be a hallmark of Buddhist modernity.

Nevertheless, from the point of view of Buddhist practice, there are limits to how egalitarian and democratic Buddhist institutions can become. While power has been and can be abused, some aspects of Buddhist life do require the authority of a lineage and a teacher. It is important to sort out which issues can be decided democratically or by group consensus, and which aspects of Buddhist life cannot be subjected to majority rule. Seniority and authorization to teach have always played a great part in Buddhist life because the Dharma is subtle and easily misunderstood. It is dangerous for people who do not understand Buddhist teachings well and who have not practiced for many years to try to decide with any authority what should be taught or what meditation technique to use. Probably, the Four Noble Truths and the teachings of no-self would not have been the result of a democratic process; they go too much against the grain of peoples’ ordinary hopes and fears. In fact, it is said that after his enlightenment experience, the Buddha thought that it would be pointless for him to teach what he had realized because people would not want to hear his Dharma. Authoritative teachers are unlikely to become unnecessary in genuine Buddhism any time soon. Because the teacher-student relationship is so important in so many forms of Buddhism, students are usually advised to check a teacher very carefully before committing to that teacher. After one has asked for
Dharma training, it is too late to debate with the teacher about one’s training.

On the other hand, many aspects of Buddhist institutional life can be dealt with in a more egalitarian manner. The budget, for example, should be decided by members who know what is needed and how to raise money, not a Dharma teacher who may easily mishandle money. Financial transparency is absolutely necessary, at least for Dharma centers in North America, Europe, and other parts of the world that are not traditionally Buddhist. Membership policies, whether to buy or rent a building, where to locate, and many other matters can and should be decided democratically rather than in an authoritarian manner. In fact, virtually all matters pertaining to community life can be decided by the community rather than a Dharma teacher. The authority of the Dharma teacher pertains to Dharma, to the teachings and practices of Buddhism, not its institutional life. And even though the Dharma teacher has spiritual authority, Dharma teachers must be subject to judgment by the community if they engage in inappropriate behavior such as sexual misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or other undharmic conduct.

In many Western Buddhist sanghas, leadership is divided into two major forms: administrative leadership and teaching. Sometimes the same people do both, but often there is specialization. Women are often administrative leaders and some centers try to have co-directors, a man and a woman. Sometimes it is argued that, because women have taken on important administrative roles in Western Buddhist organizations, problems of gender discrimination have been solved. But the key leadership role in Buddhism is, and always has been, that of the Dharma teacher. And the expectation, from the beginnings of Buddhism to the present day, has been that men will be the Dharma teachers. I have argued for many years that the lack of female teachers in traditional Buddhism is the greatest problem for Buddhist women and the arena of Buddhist life that is most in need of feminist reforms.

The tendency for men to monopolize teaching roles in Buddhism can be traced to two factors: (1) the male dominated cultures in which Buddhism was founded and in which it has always been practiced, and (2) some of the rules of Buddhist institutional life. Though Buddhism is nowhere near as patriarchal and disadvantageous to women as some of its feminist critics claim, Buddhism historically also has no track record of opposing patriarchy and male dominance. Some modern people are truly mystified about why the Buddha seemingly concurred with the male dominance of his culture, but there is little question that he did. The historical records, which may or may not go back to the Buddha himself, not only portray the Buddha as concurring with the male dominance of the times, but also as initiating rules that ensured the male dominance of his Sangha, which made it difficult or impossible for women to attain the status of a major Dharma teacher. Monastic rules of seniority declare that all nuns are junior to even the most recently ordained monk. This is the first of the eight special rules that the Buddha required women to accept before he would ordain them as nuns. All the other rules also subordinate nuns to monks. Rules such as ones that prohibit nuns from admonishing monks or criticizing them make it difficult for nuns to become the teachers of monks.1 It is also recorded that when Mahāprajāpāti, the first nun, suggested that seniority should be reckoned by how long one has been ordained, not by one’s gender, the Buddha replied that even in sects with poor leadership, men never regarded women as their superiors, so how could such behavior occur in his Sangha?2

While these rules regarding institutional hierarchy made it difficult for women to become well known Dharma teachers, it is important to recognize that they did not limit the spiritual capabilities of women in any way, and that other rules protected nuns from harassment from and servitude to monks. At least in the early period of Buddhist history, nuns are portrayed as living a lifestyle identical with that of the monks. In the formerly neglected but now famous Therīgāthā (Songs of the Women Elders), the nuns are portrayed as the equals of men in their spiritual attainments.3 This portrait of Buddhist nuns as spiritual equals of men corrects the one-sided assessment of Buddhist women’s potential that would prevail if one knows only about the Eight Special Rules. Though in later periods of Buddhist history, nuns were sometimes trained much more poorly than monks, such practices are not part of the rules of monastic discipline, and have nothing
to do with Buddhist norms. It is sad to hear stories of Buddhist nuns being taught only to chant by rote because of the view that women lack the intellectual capability to do more, but it is important to remember that such practices are not genuinely Buddhist.

Some have argued that institutional male dominance does no harm to Buddhist women so long as women receive the same training as men. Such commentators claim that the point of Buddhism is to practice and attain enlightenment, not to attain a prestigious reputation as a teacher. Some have even argued that institutional male dominance actually benefits women. With no hope of attaining status and fame as a Dharma teacher, women are free to practice sincerely and well, unencumbered by the eight worldly concerns (pain and pleasure, fame and ill-repute, praise and blame, and gain and loss). Men, by contrast, it is claimed, often take up monastic life as a career path and become more concerned about their prestige and position than about their practice and attainment, which perverts the purpose of Buddhist study and practice. But if things really worked out this way, women should definitely be the Dharma teachers because their attainments would be more genuine!

However, I would argue that an institutional arrangement that makes it difficult or impossible for women to become highly respected dharma teachers does harm women in at least five ways. First, there is sheer practicality. As Nancy Auer Falk demonstrated in her article “The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism,” the institutional subordination of nuns to monks may well have led to the demise of the nuns’ order in some parts of the Buddhist world. She argued that the decline of the nuns’ order was economic; nuns simply didn’t receive much economic support, which made it more difficult for them to survive. But she traces the lack of economic support to the fact that lay donors preferred to support the most prestigious teachers, all of whom were monks because of the rules prohibiting women from teaching men. Even an excellent woman teacher simply would not have the following of a monk, given that she could only teach other women and laypeople. Consequently, she would attract less economic support for herself and her nunnery. This was a large part of a downward spiral that doomed the nuns’ order in some parts of the Buddhist world.

Second, because women were not going to be teachers anyway, the view that they didn’t really need to receive much training or certain teachings grew stronger. Combined with cultural beliefs about women’s intellectual and spiritual inferiority, this reasoning led to widespread practices of not educating Buddhist nuns very well. For example, Tibetan Buddhist nuns were usually not taught philosophy and debate, or how to draw sand mandalas on the grounds that they would not need or use those skills anyway. Recently, Tibetan nuns have received training in such skills, but I know of no instance of women being taught or performing the so-called “lama dances” for which Tibetan Buddhism is so famous. One of my own teachers is a rare phenomenon – a woman rinpoche, or lineage-holding teacher. She tells a story of her own youth when she and her sister were being trained, but some people said that because they were girls and therefore would not be teaching, it was not important for them to be present when certain teachings were being given. As I remember the story, their mother arranged for them to be present anyway! Here we have, not a downward spiral but a vicious circle of reasoning. Because women are thought to be intellectually and spiritually inferior, it is said that they do not need to be trained. But then their lack of attainments, due to their lack of training, is used as justification for not giving women high teachings or advanced practices.

Third, given the lack of economic support and the common prejudice that women, who would not be teachers anyway, did not need to be well educated as Buddhists, it is not surprising that even in parts of the Buddhist world where women could become nuns, the option was not attractive and nuns had little prestige. In many instances, a family would be embarrassed by having a daughter become a nun, whereas when a son became a monk, that brought great honor to the family. As a result, women were often discouraged from becoming nuns or taking on serious spiritual discipline. By and large, it seems clear that most Buddhists
preferred women to become wives and mothers rather than nuns. This was true even in the Buddha’s time, as glowing reports about generous female lay donors make clear. Thus, women who had a genuine spiritual vocation often found no support for their calling, which certainly harms women.

The fourth way in which rules and practices that make it difficult or impossible for women to become highly respected Dharma teachers harms women is particularly devastating. Women practitioners have no role models. I have often heard it argued that because the Dharma is beyond gender, such issues are irrelevant. The argument is that since the Dharma is the same whether it is taught by a woman or by a man, how could it make a difference if there are few or no women Dharma teachers? I have been told that it is trivial and undignified even to bring up such concerns. But I have replied that if the Dharma is truly beyond gender, then there should be no disparity between the number of women and men teachers. Since I also claim that Dharma is genuinely gender free and gender neutral, but, nevertheless, there have been so few women teachers historically, the fault lies elsewhere. Clearly, it lies with the Buddhist tendency uncritically to buy into whatever social arrangements it finds in the surrounding culture, a tendency which goes back to the origins of Buddhism.

It is impossible to argue that role models who look like oneself make no difference. From the point of view of absolute truth, of course, role models who look like oneself are irrelevant. But students do not begin at the level of absolute truth. We begin at a very confused level of relative truth – not even accurate relative truth, but at the level of simple mistakes, really thinking that the rope is a snake, to call upon a common Buddhist teaching analogy. It is very easy to see Buddhism as a snake that is not helpful to women when most or all of the teachers are men. As a student, one asks whether it is worthwhile to become deeply involved in Buddhist study and practice if one is told that one has little chance of success because of one’s gender, and that those low chances are demonstrated daily by the lack of anyone who looks like oneself in the roles most honored by the tradition. I certainly experienced this dilemma myself. In most other cases, in which Buddhists are less defensive, there is great concern for finding the most effective skillful means for helping people see that the supposed snake is really a rope – and that the rope itself is illusory. If gender is irrelevant, as is often claimed by Buddhists, the only way to demonstrate that irrelevance is the skillful means of empowering women teachers, rather than continuing to rely on practices and rules that are fundamentally un-Buddhist, even if they are longstanding. Of course, for women to be empowered as teachers, they must first be trained completely, which is difficult in circumstances in which all women are defined as sub-ordinate to any man, whatever their relative accomplishments and seniority may be.

Finally, the fifth way in which making it difficult or impossible for women to become Dharma teachers harms women may be the most devastating of all. If there are few or no women teachers, the experiences and viewpoints of women are forever lost to history, and the women who do achieve high levels of realization despite all the obstacles they face are obliterated in the historical records. Thus, this difficulty intersects with the fourth difficulty, the lack of role models for women practitioners. The role models may well have been there, but they were not recognized and, therefore, not recorded, or recorded only in obscure sources that are not well known. Gender may be ultimately irrelevant, as most Dharma teachers would contend, but that ultimate irrelevance is situated in a relative and samsaric world that pays a great deal of attention to gender. Given that situation, though the fruitional experience of awakening is the same for men and women, their paths to that experience may well be different, in many cases. But if women are not recognized as Dharma teachers, their spiritual biographies will probably not be available to illuminate the paths for other practitioners, including men, but especially women. Some Buddhist traditions, especially the Tibetan tradition, rely heavily on the life stories of great teachers and practitioners as inspiration for contemporary students. But what is the path for a woman who has been taught that her rebirth is less free and well-favored than that of a man, who has few role models, and who probably was discouraged from thinking of herself as a serious practitioner? How does she come to a realization of the irrelevance of gender, and what does her experience of conventional gender norms mean in her path? Her specific experiences as a woman in a
male-dominated world and a male-dominated religion will be different from those of a man and are worth recording as a guidepost for other practitioners, both women and men. But who records the experiences of an unrecognized teacher? So the example of that path to realization, those specific experiences, are lost, furthering the impression that women are, indeed, less free and well-favored than are men.

Sometimes the fault for losing these stories and role models lies, not with the Buddhists of a specific era, but with those who keep the records. Women may be known in their own contexts as highly competent practitioners and teachers, but no one thinks to record their teachings, as they would think to record the teachings of a similar male teacher. Or if the records are kept, they may not be remembered as frequently as the records of male teachers. For example, the verses of the Therīgāthā were recorded, but until recent feminist scholarship on Buddhism, most Western scholars of Buddhism and most Western practitioners had never heard of them. Highly accomplished women were relatively common in Tibetan Buddhism, but the first teachers Western students of Tibetan Buddhism heard about were all men. Western practitioners of Zen Buddhism recite daily a lineage pedigree devoid of female names – until some women painstakingly reconstructed a lineage of female Dharma teachers.7

Thus, we must conclude that, although gender is ultimately irrelevant, until sexist and male-dominated conventions are eliminated from Buddhist practice, gender does matter in the relative world. As I have argued many times, the Buddhist view may be gender neutral and gender free, but Buddhist practices and institutions are not. And the view and practice should be in line with each other, not in contradiction with each other. Among the Buddhist practices that honor gender far more than it deserves to be honored, none is more devastating than the omnipresent tradition of not honoring and recognizing women as Dharma teachers, which is founded on the equally devastating practice of not training women competently and completely. And that practice, of course, traces its parentage to sexist notions of female inferiority and the need for men to be ranked as superior to women in each and every case.

Because many Western Buddhists are completely unfamiliar with Buddhist history and the way in which Buddhists usually accepted the social practices of their cultural matrix, it is important to circulate this information more widely. There are valid reasons why so many non-Buddhists regard Buddhism as a highly patriarchal religion that is quite disadvantageous to women and we should be familiar with our own dark side. Nevertheless, it is also the case that much has changed for Buddhism worldwide in the past thirty years. There is a flourishing international Buddhist women’s movement and much progress has been made in reestablishing the nuns’ Saṅgha and in upgrading the training nuns receive. The training available to laywomen has also improved greatly and Western Buddhism is almost entirely a lay movement at this point. Among Western Buddhists, many women have also been recognized as Dharma teachers, more so in the Zen and Vipassana communities than among Westerners who practice Tibetan Buddhism. Nevertheless, most observers would claim that something unprecedented in Buddhist history is happening among Western Buddhists; about half the Western Dharma teachers are women.

To what do we owe these vast changes in Buddhist practice? Certainly to the fact that they are more in line with fundamental Buddhist teachings than were traditional sexist and male dominant practices. But I have contended that at least some of the inspiration and motivation for these changes is the result of the second wave of feminism that has changed everything about our lives, hopefully for good.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 37.


6. There is a widespread popular belief in Buddhism that female rebirth is less favorable than male rebirth.

7. I have analyzed this problem in record keeping as “quadruple androcentrism.” See Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, pp. 18-19.
CONTRIBUTORS

Oksun An received a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1995 at the University of Hawaii, where she studies Buddhism. She is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy at Sunchon National University in Korea, where she teaches Buddhism and ethics. Her books include *Modern Understanding of Buddhist Ethics* (2002) and *Compassion and Benevolence* (1998).


Thich Nu Dong Anh (Nguyen Thi Kim Loan) is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Buddhist Studies at Delhi University. Her dissertation is on the modern relevance of the concept of śūnyatā in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the Pāli Nikāyas.

Martine Batchelor was a Zen Buddhist nun in Korea for ten years and now lives in France. She is the editor of *Women on the Buddhist Path* and co-editor (with Kerry Brown) of *Buddhism and Ecology* and. She is the author of *Principles of Zen* and *Meditation for Life; Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices*; and *The Path of Compassion*, a translation of the Chinese bodhisattva precepts. She is interested in meditation in daily life, Buddhism and social action, religion and women issues, *Zen* and its history, both factual and legendary. Currently, she teaches meditation retreats worldwide.

Zorigma Budaeva is a native of Buryatia. She has been instrumental in the founding of Zungon Darjaling Temple, the first temple established especially for women to study and practice the Dharma. She is the founder and director of a new children’s education project at the temple.

Varaporn Chamsanit is completing her Ph.D. dissertation in Anthropology at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University. Her doctoral research, which stems from her background in Women’s Studies and an interest in Buddhism, has a working title of “Reinstituting the Lost Lineage: Buddhist Women’s Monastic Endeavours in Thailand.”

Diana Cousens was an Honorary Research Fellow at the Monash Asia Institute, Monash University (Melbourne), and commenced a Ph.D. there in 2005. Diana lived in India for most of the 1980s, has an M.A. in Tibetan history from La Trobe University, and is the Director of the Melbourne Sakya Centre, a Tibetan Buddhist Dharma centre representing HH Sakya Trizin in Melbourne.

Shobha Rani Dash earned a Ph.D. from Otani University, Kyoto, in 2004. At present, she is a postdoctoral fellow at Otani University. Her primary field of research is women and Buddhism, particularly in India and Japan. Currently she is preparing a biographical database on bhikkhus of the Theravāda tradition.
**Ranjani de Silva** is a founding member of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women and served as its president from 1995 to 2002. Since 1987, she has been an active force in promoting the welfare of Buddhist women and coordinating higher ordinations to restore the lineage of full ordination for nuns in Sri Lanka. In 2000, she established the Sakyadhita Training and Meditation Center outside of Colombo for the training and education of nuns.

**Elise Anne DeVido** received a Ph.D. in History from Harvard University. She is an associate professor in the Department of History at National Taiwan Normal University, where she teaches world history and women's history. She has authored various articles on Taiwanese Buddhism, completed a book on Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, and is now researching 20th century Vietnamese Buddhism.

**Karuna Dharma** received a Ph.D. in English from the University of Michigan. She was one of the first American Buddhist women to receive full ordination and has been a pioneer in interreligious dialogue. She was a founding member of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women and is currently director of the International Meditation Center in Los Angeles.

**Monica Lindberg Falk** is researcher and lecturer at Gothenburg University, Sweden. She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the same university. Her research focuses on the interconnectedness of gender, religion and social change in Southeast Asia. She is currently carrying out a project on gender and Socially Engaged Buddhism in Thailand. Her contributions to Asian studies include a series of articles in English and Swedish on gender and Buddhism and the monograph *Making Fields of Merit: Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Orders in Thailand*.

**Hema Goonatilake** received her Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 1974. She was a senior faculty member at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, until 1989. Since then, she has served as a gender and development expert to UNDP and UNIFEM (New York), and UNDP (Cambodia), and as an advisor to the Buddhist Institute, Cambodia. She was a founding member of Voice of Women, the first feminist group in Sri Lanka, and co-founder of the Center for Women’s Research, Sri Lanka.

**Rita M Gross** is a scholar-practitioner who teaches Buddhism in both academic and dharmic contexts. She is professor emerita of Comparative Studies in Religion at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire and a Lopon (Senior Teacher) at Lotus Garden, Venerable Khandro Rinpoche’s retreat center in North America. She is the author of *Buddhism after Patriarchy: a Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*.

**Thich Nu Gioi Huong** (Pham Thi Ngoc Dung) became a nun when she was 15 years old. In 2003, she graduated with a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Delhi University. At present, she is working as a correspondent for Nguyet San Giac Ngo, a Buddhist news agency. She is also a commissioner in the Departments of World Buddhism and Scripture Translation at the Vietnam Buddhist Research Institute of the Executive Council of the Vietnam Buddhist Saṅgha in Vietnam.

**Sookyung Hwang** teaches Buddhism at Dongguk University in Seoul. Her research on Buddhism incorporates feminist perspectives.
Tomomi Ito graduated from Australian National University with a Ph.D. thesis on Buddhist debates in 20th-century Thailand, focusing especially on the ideas proposed by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. Currently she teaches Southeast Asian studies at Kobe University in Japan. Her research focuses on contemporary movements of female Buddhist renunciants in Thailand.

Insook Kim is professor emeritus in the Department of Sociology at Kookmin University in Korea. As a laywoman, she is active in the Korean Buddhist community.

Jeonghee Kim is a research professor at the Korean Women’s Institute of Ewha Women’s University. Her doctoral thesis was titled, “Bio-Feminism: An Ontological Study on the Basis of Buddhism and Taoism.” She is an advisor to the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute of Korea, chair of the Research Committee of the Korean Women's Environmental Network, and a director of the Korean Consumers’ Cooperative Federation.

Anne Carolyn Klein (Rigzin Drolma) teaches Buddhism in the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University and is a founding director (with Harvey Aronson) of Dawn Mountain, a contemplative center for Buddhist study and practice in Houston. Her books include Meeting the Great Bliss Queen; Path to the Middle; and Knowledge and Liberation. Forthcoming are Unbounded Wholeness: Bön Dzogchen and The Logic of the Nonconceptual, with Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, and Transmission: Heart Essence, the Vast Expanse.

Daewon Kwon is a professor in the Department of Primary Education at Dongguk University in Seoul. She is a fully ordained nun in the Korean tradition.

Changsook Lee a Ph.D. in Buddhist Women’s Studies at the Graduate School of Dongguk University. Her doctoral thesis was entitled, “A Study of Women's Capability to Become a Buddha in Indian Buddhism.” She worked as a reporter for daily newspapers such as Daehan Ilbo and Hankook Ilbo, and taught at Dongguk University. She now serves as an advisory committee member of the Buddhist Women’s Development Institute (Korea).

Chopa Tenzin Lhadron is from the Himalayan region of Zangskar and has been a nuns since childhood. Since 1988, she has been studying at Jamyang Chöling Monastery in Dharamsala, under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She is currently studying Abhidharma texts.

Yuchen Li is an associate professor in the Department of Chinese Literature at National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. Her research interests include: gender issues in religious studies, Buddhist literature, and the Chinese religious novels. She is author of Tadai da Biquiuni (Bhikṣuṇīs of the Tang Dynasty) and Cooking and Religious Practice, and editor of Women and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Perspective (Funu yu zongjiao: kualingyu de shiye).

Andrea Loseries studied Tibetology, Indology, Buddhism, and Ethnology in Paris, Santiniketan (West Bengal), and Vienna. Her Ph.D. dissertation at Vienna University was titled, “On the Use of Human Skulls and Bones in Tibetan Rituals.” She carries out regular research in Tibet, Mongolia, and India, and frequently translates for Tibetan teachers. She specializes in Buddhist iconography and tantric ritualism and was director of Kalachakra Culture Graz 2002.
Thea Mohr holds a Ph.D. from Frankfurt University (Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität) where she is currently an assistant professor. Her main area of research is religion and science, particularly recent findings in neurobiology and meditation. She is managing director of Diakonisches Werk, a major German charity trust in Frankfurt am Main.

Eliana Morris has worked in public schools as a social worker, classroom teacher, and educational consultant for 15 years. She has concentrated her efforts on developing the Compassion Mind Training Curriculum: Creating the Causes for Happiness, a program to provide children the steps to a fulfilling life by presenting Buddhadharma in an appropriate non-religious context in mainstream public education. She is currently engaged in a six-year program studying the monastic commentaries of the Gelugkpa tradition culminating in a three year meditation retreat.

Trina Nahm-Mijo is Professor of Psychology, Dance, and Women’s Studies at Hawai`i Community College, where she has been teaching since 1978. She received her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation: “The Spiritual and Physical Movement in Humans: An Inquiry into Human Growth Potential” examined mind-body integration as practiced in Eastern philosophy and explored dance as a psycho-therapeutic tool. She is a community activist who has started many programs involving education, human services, culture, and the arts.

Gantumur Natsagdorj is the founder and director of Tugs Bayasgalant Center (Heaven of Joy) Mongolian Buddhist Women’s in Ulaan Batar, Mongolia. This was the first center in Mongolia to provide opportunities for women to study and practice the Dharma.

Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha) is a native of Vietnam affiliated with Hue Lam Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City. She completed a B. A. at the Vietnam Institute of Advance Buddhist Studies in 1997. She completed M. A. and M. Phil. degrees in Buddhist Studies at Delhi University and is currently doing research there on the “Origin and Development Bhikkhunî Saṅgha in Vietnam” in the Department of Buddhist Studies.

Tenzin Norzin is a native of Kinnaur, a Himalayan border region of India. After completing high school, she joined Jamyang Chöling Institute for Buddhist Studies near Dharamsala, where she studies under the guidance of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She is currently studying Madhyamaka philosophy.

Tenzin Palmo was born and raised in England. In 1964, at the age of 18, she went to India to find a qualified teacher of Buddhism. Soon thereafter she received ordination as a novice nun and spent 18 years practicing in the remote Himalayan region of Lahaul. In 1973, she traveled to Hong Kong to receive the bhikṣuṇi ordination. Currently she is working to establish a monastery for the training of togdenmas (female yogic practitioners) near the community of Tashi Jong in northern India. Her story has been documented in A Cave in the Snow.

Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap (Duong Thi Thanh Huong) is a Ph.D. candidate in the Buddhist Studies Department at Delhi University, India.

Junya Pookayaporn received her Ph.D. in East-West Psychology from the California Institute of Integral Studies in 2001. Her primary areas of interest are Buddhism, women rights, and psychology. She is a founder of Dharma Sisters Project, which has a mission to provide education and health care for Buddhist practitioners, especially nuns in Thailand and Burma. Currently she teaches courses at Sripatum University, Bangkok.
Amita Dhakwa Shakya studied Buddhism at a young age at Nepal Baudhha Pariyatt in Kathmandu and completed an M. Sc. in Botany at Tribhuvan University in 1983. She is currently vice president of the International Buddhist Mediation Center in Kathmandu, president of Deepankar Pariyatti Shikchalaya (Buddhist Education Center), and a plant protection officer with the Department of Agriculture HMG of Nepal. She has published a number of books on Buddhism in Nepali language.

Gyehwan Sunim is a professor in the Department of Seon Studies at Dongguk University in Seoul. She is a Korean Buddhist scholar and practitioner. Her recent major work is *The World of Mahayana Buddhism* (in Korean) published in 2005.

Iljung Sunim is a fully ordained nun in the Korean tradition. She is a well-known teacher of vipassanā meditation.

Jinmyong Sunim is a fully ordained nun and is actively involved in teaching Buddhism in Korea. She is renowned for her innovative approaches to teaching Dharma on Korean Buddhist Broadcasting, also known as Korea's leading Buddhist DJ.

Jihong Sunim has been ordained as a nun since the age of 16. She graduated from Sangha University and received a Masters degree in Social Welfare from Dongkok University. She has directed the Buddhist Chapel at Seoul Asan Hospital since 1996. She is currently a lecturer on religion and medicine at Ulsan University, a clinical research commissioner at Ilsan Hospital, and abbess of Jung Hyang Temple in Seoul.

Kwangwoo Sunim has practiced Dharma for almost 70 years and is a past president of the Korean Bhikkhuni Association. For many years she has taught Dharma and been actively involved in numerous other Buddhist endeavors in Korea. The Korean government recognized her with an award for her work educating young students. Her major publication is a translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Korean.

Sangduck Sunim is a fully ordained nun in the Korean tradition. She is actively involved in social welfare work in Korea.

Sukdham Sunim (Inyoung Chung) is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Virginia, where she is writing about Korean nuns. Her research interests include women's issues in Buddhism and the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya. Her study, “A Buddhist View of Women: A Comparative Study of the Rules for Bhikṣuṇīs and Bhikṣus Based on the Chinese Prātimoksa,” is available online.

Wunweol Sunim is a Korean bhikkhuni, ordained in 1980. She received her Ph.D in Buddhist Studies from Dongguk University. She currently teaches Seon (Zen) and Tibetan Buddhism and leads Seon practice at Dongguk University, Seoul. Her research interests include Bodhidharma, the practice of samdhi, the Korean lineage of Seon thought and practice, and the *Lakvattra Sūtra*.

Shoyo Taniguchi received an M.A. and completed doctoral course work in English Literature at Nanzan University Nagoya (Japan). She received an M.A. in Buddhist Biomedical Ethics and a Ph.D. in Systematic Buddhist Ethics at the Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley). From 1997-2002, she was an associate professor at Kagoshima University Dental School where she taught medical/dental ethics. Currently she is the resident minister at Southern Alameda County Buddhist Church in Union City, California.
Stefania Travagnin is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department for the Study of Religions at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Her research interests focus on Chinese Buddhism, the Madhyamika School in China and Taiwan, and the life of Venerable Yinshun (1906–2005).

Shu-Hui Tsai also known as Ju Yan, is a radio show host, painter, and freelance writer. She has an M. A. in Philosophy from the Chinese Culture University in Taiwan and currently teaches Chinese literature at a high school in Taipei. She has won several awards for her broadcasting and children’s literature.

Jampa Tsedroen (Carola Roloff) has taught Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy (5-year study course) and works as interpreter at Tibetisches Zentrum, Hamburg, since 1985. She became a Buddhist in 1980, received novice ordination in 1981, and full ordination in 1985. She pursued a traditional monastic education under Geshe Thubten Ngawang from 1980–1996, specializing in Vinaya, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Hamburg University. She has been active as an administrator, board member, and advisor at the Tibetisches Zentrum, the German Buddhist Union, Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, and the Foundation for Tibetan Buddhist Studies for many years.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is an assistant professor in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of San Diego. She is president of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women and director of Jamyang Choling Institute, an education project for women in developing countries. Her books include Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations, Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream, and Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements.

Sumon K. Tuladhar worked as a senior research officer at the Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development at Tribhuvan University for 20 years and is currently an education project officer at UNICEF Nepal. She received her doctorate in Education from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst in 1994. Her major contributions have been in the field of non-formal education for illiterate women and children in Nepal. She is an advisor in Dharma Kirti Buddhist Study Circle and Dharma Kirti Vihar Trust and has published many articles on Buddhism, education, and culture.

Peou Vanna was formerly a project coordinator for the Association of Nuns and Lay Women of Cambodia. Currently she is the executive director of Working Group for Weapons Reduction in Phnom Penh. Her research interests include the women and poverty, Buddhism and feminism in Cambodia, and the impact of rice production in Southeast Asia.

Ivette Vargas received a B.A. in Political Science at Barnard College, Columbia University, in 1987, and a Ph.D. in Religion and Buddhist Studies at Harvard University in 2003. She is currently an assistant professor of Asian Religions at Austin College in Texas. Her research interests include Buddhist philosophy and ritual; Tibetan Buddhist biographies; South Asian religious history and art; ritual studies; the interface of illness, healing, and religion; comparative studies in religion; gender studies; and medical anthropology.

Claudia Wenzel received her Ph.D. from Heidelberg University, Germany, in 2001. Her field of study is East Asian History of Art, specializing in Buddhist Art in China. Currently she is involved in a project of The Academy of Sciences in Heidelberg on stone scriptures in China. Research topics include arts related to Maitreya and Amitabha beliefs in China, the universalistic teachings of the Three Levels, and the iconic and aniconic representations of the Dharma in Chinese cave temples.
Malia Dominica Wong, O.P., is an associate professor of World Religions at Chaminade University of Honolulu. She received a Ph.D. from the University of Creation Spirituality in 2000 with a dissertation titled, “The Gastronomics of Learning From Each Other: Parallels in Spiritual Practices.” She has been involved with Buddhist-Christian practices since 1986 and has been steadfastly working to build bridges of harmony among peoples of all denominations. She is grateful to be a member of Sakyadhita and to be at its service.

I-li Yang was born in Taipei, Taiwan in 1944. She received an M.A. in American Literature from National Taiwan Normal University in 1971, and M.A. in ESL from University of Minnisota in 1972, and a Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education from the University of Texas in 1981. She was a professor of English and Linguistics at National Chengchi University in Taiwan until 1999.

Hyangsoon Yi received a Ph.D in English from Penn State University, with a minor in Film Studies. Her dissertation is entitled: “The Traveler in Modern Irish Drama.” She is an assistant professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. Her research interests include: Buddhist aesthetics in Korean literature and cinema, Korean Buddhist nuns, and itinerancy in Irish literature. She is the author of Buddhist Nuns and Korean Literature and editor of Buddhist Nuns in East Asia. She is currently working a book-length study on Korean Buddhist films.
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