

Sakyadhita

International Association of Buddhist Women

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The 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam attracted 2,400 participants from 30 countries

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! Videotaping The Sakyadhita Conference *Damchö Drolma*

My hands were barely accustomed to operating a video camera when I arrived in Ho Chi Minh City to attend the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference. It was my first conference, and the first conference that anyone from our Dharma center had attended, so I was determined to document the experience on film for my sisters back at Lerab Ling in France.

The moment we were welcomed at the airport under the tender care of a senior Vietnamese nun and a team of young volunteers, I felt that every moment of the conference would be worth sharing. Starting the next day at the opening ceremony, I clutched my small hand-held camera and ventured into the host temple. I filmed every event – from getting out of the taxi, watching the Vietnamese nuns alight from their scooters, marveling at the effulgent display of marigold petals that showered the 2,400 conference participants as they passed through the temple gates, to the more formal opening ceremonies taking place in the main hall.

I found myself absorbed and inspired by seeing so many sisters of all traditions and countries gathered together. The mere physical beauty of the displays, the grace and poise of the nuns, and the particular aesthetic of Vietnamese culture were all very impressive. All this and the many stimulating and informative papers ensured that my filming became an avid occupation – a particular vehicle through which I experienced the conference.

Soon, the video camera became my passport to explore many facets of the conference more intimately, particularly the participants. I interviewed many people and made great friendships with Buddhist women from the Himalayas, the forests of Thailand, the plains of India, the streets of Kuala Lumpur, and the countryside of England. The camera also captured many expressions of devotion of the laity, with wafting clouds of incense and stems of budding lotuses, vegetarian banquets for the Sangha and international delegates, as well as cultural performances. When we ventured on a tour of Vietnam, I recorded the bus rides, kept buoyant by chanting and singing for hours on end. My camera captured it all, as we stopped at a number of special pagodas, temples, and Buddhist sites.

In the evenings, I began the painstaking task of downloading and converting files, before trying my hand, around midnight, at some simple editing, so that I could share the delights and insights of each day by posting onto a blog recently set up by our monastic community in France.

As the days passed, my newfound ocular passion became second nature, and it became more and more clear that everything I was documenting had great significance. Throughout the conference, we heard the stories of eminent Buddhist women, both historical and contemporary. I came to realize



that the very subjects who appeared through my camera's lens, especially those who took the lead in organizing this conference, were truly eminent Buddhist women. Their actions showed to me, more than any written papers, what an eminent Buddhist woman is. Because of this, I also realized that accurate and complete documentation is utterly crucial.

For this reason, I urge all of us in Sakyadhita to keep written and pictorial records of our work as Buddhist women, documenting every aspect of our development over time. To paraphrase Sir Winston Churchill, "History will be kind to us, for we intend to write it!"

THE BUS RIDE TO NIRVANA

Diana Ingalls-Farrell

At 4:00 a.m., there was a light tap-tap-tapping on the window of the room where I was sleeping. A pleasant voice said, "Please have some hot coffee in the dining room. There is hot milk in the dining room." That was the wake up call at a beautiful Zen temple where we spent the night. I hurried to dress, drank the much-needed coffee, and started off with my wheelie bag down the long walkway to the parking lot where the busses were waiting. It was a lot easier going down than it had been going up the night before.

The night before was a challenge: uphill all the way, dragging the fully packed wheelie bag behind me. Two monks passed me going the other way. One glanced at me and said to his companion, "Oh! A lot of stuff!" He actually said "stuff!" I really wanted to explain to him that I didn't have anything that wasn't absolutely essential. I had clothes for hot weather and cold weather because someone said I would freeze in Hanoi. I had rain gear. Toiletries are necessary to maintain cleanliness and good health. Dietary supplements are important when traveling to keep your system balanced. And last but not least one needs back up camera

batteries.

I was quiet because I realized it was my attachment to all of these material possessions that was causing my suffering all the way up that hill. In another religion this suffering might be called doing penance but in Buddhism it might be called "instant karma." When I reached the parking lot in the darkness of the early morning, I mistakenly put my bag on the wrong bus. Too late! I could only hope my bag and I would end up at the same hotel. So, this was the preamble to the day ahead that would prove to be so full of adventure and mystery.

After finding my seat on the bus, I dozed off, waking just as the sun was rising. The scenery we were driving past was beautiful. My seat partner was great. We had met earlier and I had enjoyed her company before we wound up on the bus together. So I was a little sad to learn she would be getting off the bus later to go to Angkor Wat. I had a little meltdown at that point thinking how lonely I was going to be and how I wished I had had a good night's sleep. I came up with a few more negative thoughts because I'm good at it. But the melt down faded as we journeyed on...and on.... and on. Tenacity became a kind of focus.

Now things were getting harder and less comfortable. Distances between planned stops were getting longer. Water was not as plentiful, and a few people were getting sick. There was an undertone of grumbling. Some people decided to leave the tour. I began having flashbacks of another bus journey some years ago; a bus journey in India.

I had gone to India to see the Eight Holy Places of Buddha with our Lama, Jigdhel Dagchen Sakya Rinpoche from Seattle. It was a five-week trip and all sorts of unexpected things happened. In the beginning I had fantasized that, since it was a pilgrimage, people would act "holy." Wrong. There were complaints about the bus driver who used the horn relentlessly. There were complaints about not enough water, the food was not appealing, hotels had bugs. People were getting sick, and some were sick most of the time. Some people left the trip altogether.

After a time, I began to see that it was best to quit having expectations and fears. Expectations caused grasping and disappointment and fears prevented me from being able to fully participate in the moment. And besides, wasn't this a *pilgrimage*? Wasn't this the time for the application of practices we had studied about? Here was an opportunity to really do it, while visiting these incredible holy places. I am not a Buddhist scholar, but I do know a few basics, such as having compassion for the person in the next seat having an anxiety attack; having loving kindness, even for the bus driver; and helping end the suffering of all sentient beings, starting with one cup of miso soup for a sick friend.

Then I started receiving what I call little gems, like gifts. One



Conference Theme: LEADING TO LIBERATION

12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women

Bangkok, Thailand ~ June 12-18, 2011

Temple Tour ~ June 19

PANEL TOPICS

Buddhist Women of Thailand
 Buddhist Women of the World
 Leading Buddhist Women
 The Many Forms of Compassion
 Lineage, Authority, Leadership
 Speaking of Other Religions...

Mr. Dharma, Ms. Samsara: Challenging Stereotypes
 Warming Up: Buddhist Women & Global Sustainability
 New Directions for Buddhist Social Transformation
 Ethics & Awareness
 Peaceful Mind, Peaceful World
 The Bhikkhuni Issue Revisited
 Women Transforming Buddhist Temples
 Practical Dharma: Linking Buddhism & Human Needs

www.sakyadhita.org

was a brief and meaningful encounter with an inspiring nun from Japan. Another gem was an exquisite boat ride on the Ganges at dawn, with Rinpoche and our Sangha chanting together. There were many more.

So, I thought: What about the bus ride in Viet Nam? Wasn't that a pilgrimage too? Weren't there the same opportunities to practice the Dharma? Couldn't my experience in India be overlaid onto the trip in Viet Nam and the same lessons applied? The answer, of course, was yes. So, I began to remember my point of view on that other pilgrimage.

It was well past midnight when we arrived at our hotel and I re-connected with my bag. Then I received my first little gem; A friendly and thoughtful nun was assigned as my roommate. My second gem came on the next day's bus ride, because I had some serious questions about my personal Dharma practice. Here I was on a bus that was filled with learned women. What an opportunity to get some help! The woman sitting right beside me kindly agreed to be the one to help. She listened to my questions and gave me some new perspectives and a new direction for my spiritual path. I am still receiving little gems from that trip.

Riding the bus on a pilgrimage is not easy. There are many twists in the road. Meeting the challenges and taking the opportunities to practice Dharma on a pilgrimage becomes a metaphor for dealing with obstacles during the journey through life. The bus driver moves before me like Vajrapani, a wrathful protector deity. I am surrounded by *bodhisattvas*, and teachers waiting to be asked for knowledge. Some people will have other metaphors for living life in the Dharma, or will understandably choose other vehicles. But as for me, I'm staying on the bus to *nirvana*.

WALKING TOGETHER IN DIVERSITY

On The Buddha's Path

Rotraut (Jampa) Wurst

At the recent 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam, I organized a workshop called "Walking Together in Diversity on the Buddha's Path. I organized it under my rapper name, DJ Jampa Sausage. How did I come up with the idea of a workshop by that title?

At the 10th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Mongolia in 2008, Sandy Boucher mentioned the word "lesbian" in her talk about American Buddhist women, "From Our History to Our Future." This was the first time I had heard the word mentioned at a Sakyadhita conference. We then discussed the idea



of organizing an international panel about lesbian Buddhist women all over the world. We agreed, however, that the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam was not the right time for such a panel. It is still difficult to talk openly about diversity issues, due to patriarchal prejudices in conservative societies. Upon reflection, I came to the conclusion that it would be good to propose a workshop on Buddhist women and diversity. A workshop on this topic would enable us to address diversity issues in a much broader, more open way, and not harm anyone's feelings. I asked the colleagues whom I had invited to organize the panel with me to be patient and to share their ideas for a workshop.

We decided to title the workshop "Walking Together in Diversity on the Buddha's Path." It explored the idea that Buddhism does not only link people together, but may also help us relate to people of diverse cultural and individual backgrounds. I hoped that diving deeper into the subject of diversity would help us reach the limits of our imagination and the question of acceptance.

In the workshop, I began by talking about different examples of being diverse. For example, how do we feel about ugliness? Most of the time, we do not reflect on this, but simply react spontaneously. To take another example, when we think about food, we realize that our likes and dislikes depend on cultural conditioning as well as individual preferences.

A common source of misunderstandings and cause for offending other people's sensibilities are different ideas of family and individuality that are found in different cultures. Aren't cultural attitudes a major basis for constructing our identities? As long



Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion works for the benefit of living beings

as we are curious about each other, we are open and longing for sympathy. When does this turn into ignorance and rejection?

Friends and families often talk about misunderstandings. Meanwhile, we are often unaware that, beyond our imaginations, there may be a reality that we do not share. This is not a case of misunderstanding, but a case of no understanding.

Does Buddhism offer support, images, or guidelines for realizing another person's world? Is it broad enough to encompass a desire for communication? Is communication just a cross-cultural subject or does it is a central Buddhist concern? When we think about these questions, what do we find?

With these questions, I introduced some ideas from Diana Paul's book, *Women in Buddhism*. One idea, in particular, intrigued me. The *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra* talks about changing sex, from female to male, and whether it is necessary in order to become enlightened.

This interesting text tells the story of a goddess who discusses enlightenment with the monk Sariputra. Because he does not seem to understand that the body is only form and has nothing to do with becoming enlightened, she transforms him into a female and herself into a male, using her magical power. In this great Buddhist text, Sariputra learns that women and men, although different in sex, are equal in their potential to become enlightened.

After this discussion, we talked about our own diversity and differences: about our diverse cultures – Vietnam, Malaysia, India, the U.S., Germany, Great Britain, Indonesia, and so on – and also about our diverse lifestyles. Of the roughly 30 women in the workshop, many were Vietnamese nuns and laywomen. Some laywomen live with partners, while some are single.

When a woman from the U.S. and Europe shared that she lives with a woman partner, the reaction was not only interesting, but surprising and wonderful. The translator, a Vietnamese nun, prefaced her comments by expressing her tolerance and compassion, saying, "You are so courageous to say that openly. We can see that you are nervous, but you are able to talk openly about your lifestyle. That is great." It was also wonderful to hear the abbess of a nunnery say that they were lucky to hear the topic discussed openly. The felt unhappy that, in their tradition, the topic "would be kept behind." As we shared our experiences, there was no intolerance, no aggressiveness, and no prejudice.

One woman talked about a different kind of diversity. She was born in a Christian family, but ever since she became a Buddhist, her family has not interested in her anymore. In response, the Vietnamese nuns were helpful in encouraging her to keep trying to talk with her family.

Another woman shared her experience with diversity: Born in a Buddhist family in India, she experienced diversity, since Buddhists are a minority in India. Then she moved to the U.S. and again experienced diversity, because she encountered so many different cultures, ideas, lifestyles, and also many different Buddhist traditions. She immediately received an invitation to visit a temple in Malaysia where all three traditions – Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana – are practiced in one temple.

This very supportive workshop reached an understanding, rather than a conclusion. I tried to sum up all this diversity in a rap. And the participants liked it, especially the Vietnamese nuns. They asked me to perform the rap again for another abbess and her nuns, which I did. Then they asked for a copy of the English text, because they considered it "powerful" and wanted to translate it into Vietnamese.

The Vietnamese nuns asked me to perform the rap for all the eminent Buddhist women at the conference. After the workshop, I asked Bhiksuni Tenzin Palmo whether she would allow me to perform the rap after her evening Dharma talk. She had heard me rap during a workshop on "Buddhism and Pop Culture" at the Sakyadhita Conference in Mongolia and invited me on stage.

In Vietnam, we were again able to share our experiences of walking together in diversity on the Buddha's path. No matter which culture or tradition we came from or what lifestyle we have adopted, we could all join together to share our experiences. After that workshop and all the compassion and wise understanding we shared, I think it is time for an international panel about lesbian Buddhist Women at the next Sakyadhita conference!

We began and ended with an empty circle. In our Sitting Council, we passed the Talking Piece which is returned to the center of the circle after each person speaks. In this way, we remind ourselves more strongly that all emerges from and returns to emptiness.

May all beings be happy! May all beings be well! May all beings be safe!



The youngest cultural performers at the Sakyadhita conference in Vietnam

BEING A GUEST WORKER IN SOMEONE ELSE'S TRADITION

Beth Goldring

My article, "Being a Guest Worker in Someone Else's Tradition," highlights the importance of respecting the country, Buddhist traditions, and social customs of a place that is not one's own. It acknowledges the obligation of a guest to accept gratefully what is offered and try to avoid presuming or imposing one's own assumptions upon situations that one cannot fully understand. As an American Zen nun practicing in a Japanese lineage and working in Cambodia, with its Theravada traditions, it is especially important for me to understand my place as a guest and not make presumptions. This is not always easy. And it does not mean that one accepts slavishly or blindly things that appear not only different, but uncompassionate. It means learning to tread carefully and with respect and trying to incorporate necessary differences and changes into what is familiar and comfortable to one's hosts.

My Cambodian staff and I work with destitute AIDS patients in Phnom Penh. We are just finishing our tenth year of work. During that time, the AIDS epidemic in Cambodia has changed radically. When we began, there were no medicines and everyone died. Our job as Buddhist chaplains was to help people find as much peace as possible within that situation. As antiretroviral medicines became increasingly available and it became possible for people to live with AIDS, our work changed to incorporate social work into our programs and, later, material aid. Our work includes chaplaincy or emotional and spiritual support; social work, deep listening, and counseling, along with referrals to other organizations; and material aid. Material aid is most often medicine and transportation money for people to reach their doctors, but also support in the form of food and money for prisoners with AIDS and tuberculosis; food support for children in the hospital; food support for those hospitalized AIDS and multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis patients; and larger, long term projects of various sorts.

Our major chaplaincy tools, in addition to traditional Khmer chanting and ceremonies, include Reiki and Healing Touch. While these are not traditional Khmer skills, they are easily absorbed into Khmer traditional healing strategies. When we began, I thought we would teach meditation. But people who are sick and exhausted do not really have the strength to learn new skills. What the Reiki and Healing Touch do, in my experience, is allow people to enter meditative states without having to put forth effort. We do so much of this work because the patients appreciate it so deeply.

We repair hospital mortuaries. We put a Buddha in the National AIDS Hospital mortuary, and clean and chant there on major precept days. A young woman whose mother died helped us with the cleaning and chanting. Two years ago, we repaired the horribly dilapidated mortuary at Chea Chum Neas Hospital and now maintain it and chant there, also. At Chea Chum Neas we also provide money for cremations for the destitute; previously such people were buried without ceremony at the back of the hospital grounds.

Our primary chanting is the regular Wat chanting. But my staff members are also learning another, unique form of Khmer chanting called Smot. It is very beautiful and tells stories from the life of the Buddha. It is most often used at funerals and related ceremonies.

Mae Srey Lek was a wonderful woman who died in 2006. Her daughter had died in 2002 and her husband in 2003. She took care of her family by collecting recyclables in the streets of Phnom Penh, getting up at 3 am everyday to earn about US\$2.50/day, working until the afternoon. Her husband beat her. Her older sons abused and beat her, stealing the money she earned for food in order to drink and gamble. In addition to AIDS, she developed vaginal cancer, which was not diagnosed until it was too late to operate. My staff would not let her despair, forcing her to get tuberculosis medicines and to begin antiretroviral treatment, even though she had little time left. During that time she became much more hopeful and wanted to ordain. She shaved her head and received the precepts at the National AIDS Hospital mortuary. She died very, very peacefully. We provided her with a full funeral, which was attended by the whole community.

As our staff members work with patients, the quality of their work is reflected in our patients faces. Lok Yay, a Khmer nun; is simultaneously everyone's grandmother and the Buddha. Ramo is one of our very gifted Reiki practitioners, very concentrated and full of tenderness. Pheap, our director, is both practical and compassionate. He is the person who holds the organization together. Heng is our *mudita* specialist. She has a tremendous gift for bringing joyfulness to the most difficult situations. Soeun is our second very gifted Reiki practitioner. Her strength and warmth are a tremendous gift to patients. Sok Ny is our specialist in right effort. While she is not our most talented staff member, she puts 200% effort into everything she does and deeply inspires the rest of us. Keo, a trained nurse who works mornings in the surgical ward of Calmette Hospital, is very, very gentle with patients. Preung only started working with us this past year, but has such a deep kindness to the patients that it seems he has been with us for many years. Nyeung, who started working with us late last year, puts her whole heart and effort into all her work.

In order to continue doing this work over time, it is essential that we study the Dhamma. We chant and meditate every day and spend one day a week in Dhamma training. We study *vipassana* meditation in the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw and, last year, held our first retreat. Before that, I studied abroad in Burma and my staff did Goenka retreats. Our retreat teacher, Sheila Robinson, has studied *vipassana* for over 30 years with many respected teachers, including Ayya Khema. Our translator, Trent Walker, is an incipient specialist in Khmer Buddhism. Bhikkhu Yos Hut Khemacaro built a meditation hall where we held the retreat, behind the hospital he supports. He was a great friend of Samdech Maha Ghosananda and worked to provide school sanitation in remote villages of his home province. Vann SiVorn heads the Dhammayietra, the Cambodian peace walk, and also participates in retreats.

Over the years, we have worked very hard to bring Cambodian traditions and ways of doing things into the project as fully as possible. It is essential that our chaplaincy be accessible and

comfortable for people who have no strength left and who need to feel at ease with what is presented to them. In the end, my staff is far better than I am at doing this because they come from inside the society and can better judge these things. For me, chaplaincy is a continuous training in another form of Buddhism, one with its own deep, rich history, and traditions, which helps me develop a deeper understanding of my own root tradition. The foundation, accessible to all, is the compassion of the Buddha that nourishes everything.

Beth Kanji Goldring is a Buddhist nun in the Japanese Zen tradition. She has been working in Cambodia since 1996. Since the beginning of 2000, she has especially worked with destitute AIDS patients in Cambodia. Her work is informed by the Mahayana activist tradition..

SAKYADHITA IN CYPERSPACE

A Report from the Vietnam Conference Workshop

Charlotte Collins

The internet has become a primary source of news, information, history, texts, and teachings for Buddhists around the world. The internet is not only a resource, but it also connects us in a new way, potentially knitting Buddhist women together as a one-world community. One of the highlights for me of the 11th Sakyadhita Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, December 28, 2009, to January 3, 2010, was the workshop I gave on building websites – “Sakyadhita in Cyberspace: A Website Workshop for National Branches and Others.”

My students were 15 nuns from Vietnam and Thailand. I conducted the workshop in English and a nun from each group translated for the others. Jayanta (Shirley Johannesen), president of Sakyadhita Canada, supported me in the workshop by ensuring the comfort of the attendees.

First, I presented an overview of the Internet and how it works: how a webpage is constructed and how it is posted on a website on the internet. Next, participants got some hands-on experience in website planning by starting the layouts for their own websites.

There was a high level of interest among the nuns who attended. One wanted to build a website for her pagoda, another wanted to build a webpage for her master, and another wanted to build a website for her social work project. All of these women recognized the importance of a presence on the internet for communicating in this era.

Overview of the Internet

I began by explaining that the internet is a network of computers called servers. Using a special computer application called a text editor, the webmaster (or user) writes a webpage in hyper-text markup language (html) code, a special language that can be displayed by a web browser. Some popular web browsers are Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox and Apple Safari. Some text editors, such as Adobe Dreamweaver, are expensive. However, there are several inexpensive text editors, such as Edit Plus (www.editplus.com) and UltraEdit (www.ultraedit.com) for Windows, and TextMate (www.macromates.com) for Mac OSX. TextPad for Windows (www.textpad.com) has international editions in many languages. Microsoft Windows comes with WordPad, which can be used for writing html code, but it does not have built-in tools to help write the code. The web designer has to learn all the html code first! There are many text editors that can be found by searching on www.google.com. To create and maintain Sakyadhita's website (www.sakyadhita.org) and the Jamyang Foundation website (www.jamyang.org), I use Adobe Dreamweaver (www.adobe.com).

Posting a Webpage on the Internet

After writing a webpage in html, the web designer has to send the page to the server of a web host. This posting is done by using a file transfer protocol (FTP) program, which most text editors have. The web designer must rent space from a web host on a server. Sakyadhita's webhost is A2hosting (www.a2hosting.com). This all sounds very complicated, but by the end of the workshop, half the participants were writing basic html code for a page. Several stayed



Charlotte Collins with young Vietnamese conference volunteers

after class while I demonstrated the writing of the html code on one of the monastery lab computers.

How to Learn More

An important resource for anyone who wants to build a website is the World Wide Web Consortium, the international organization that sets the standards or rules for the Internet. The W3C has a huge website where everything related to website standards and the Internet can be found in 25 languages (www.w3.org). More importantly, W3C has a website that contains hundreds of tutorials for learning everything about creating content for the Internet, called W#C Schools (www.w3schools.com). Unfortunately, this site appears to be only in English. The site includes a tutorial on basic html for writing webpages (www.w3schools.com/Html/html_intro.asp).

New, Easier Website Building Tools

In addition to creating webpages from scratch by writing html in a text editor, there are now easier and more user-friendly ways to create websites by using blogging services such Google's Blogger (www.blogger.com), Blogspot (www.blogspot.com), and WordPress (www.wordpress.com). These blogging services are easy to use, offer many design templates, and allow designers to create and upload their own backgrounds, logos, and images. Google offers a similar website service called Google Sites (www.sites.google.com) that provides design templates that are very easy to use. For example, see: Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage (www.aranyabodhi.org). These services have taken most of the difficulty out of building websites, so much so that, if I teach this workshop at the next Sakyadhita conference, I will probably focus on using blogging services to set up quick and beautiful websites that can be viewed on all types of screens, computers, cell phones, and other mobile devices. I will also continue to give readers updated information on the Internet's emerging technologies.

Regardless of the tools we use to create websites, whether for

computer screens or mobile devices, the important thing is that, if we have an interest, we should learn how to do it. The skill of building websites today is as important as writing was 5000 years ago. At that time and for centuries to follow, people who could write performed a critical service for others who could not. The web designer or web master today is critically important for sharing news and information – even more so, because the Internet can carry our message around the globe.

A GARLAND FOR THE PERTH BHIKKHUNIS

Jacqueline Kramer

In the winter 2009 issue of Parabola magazine, there is an article in which Bhikkhu Bodhi shares the story of his chance encounter with the first Buddhist monk to cross his path. As he watched the monk walk across the campus green, he was “struck with wonder and amazement at the sight of this serene, self-composed man, who radiated a lightness, inner contentment, and dignity I had never seen in any Westerner.” He went on to write about a second chance encounter with this same monk a couple of years later and the unexpected happenstance of the monk translating the four Nikayas of the Pali Cannon into Vietnamese, a work which Bhikkhu Bodhi would translate into English. This “chance” encounter with the monk Thich Minh Chau was Bhikkhu Bodhi’s lovely and synchronistic first breath of Buddhism that continued to waft gracefully in and out of his monastic career.

What sort of an impression is made on a young Thai boy watching a gentle monk with orange robes walking mindfully down a dusty road with his bowl in hand, or a Sri Lankan boy whose first teacher is a kind, patient monk with a deep meditation practice? A boy can see his future in the face of a well-practiced monk, which can immerse him in Buddhism more deeply than a million wise words.

What about our girls? What would it mean for the future of a girl to have her heart touched by hearing a Dhamma talk given by a mindful, empowered female monastic? How would it affect a girl if she could express her hopes and fears in the loving presence of a *bhikkhuni*? How would it change a culture to have both female and male expressions of engaged enlightenment, equal in respect and power, as physical embodiments of the Dhamma? This question of equity is one that people of good will throughout the world, are currently examining at every angle – political, social, educational, psychological, and religious. In July 2009, the Elders Group, which included Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter and others, made the statement, “Religion and tradition are a great force for peace and progress around the world. However, we believe that the justification of discrimination against women and girls on the grounds of religion or tradition, as if it were prescribed by a higher authority, is unacceptable. We believe that women and girls share equal rights with men and boys in all aspects of life. We call upon all leaders to promote and protect equal rights for women and girls.”

In this spirit, Ajahn Brahm, who was sincerely touched by the voices of women wanting to ordain, began publicly discussing the possibility of developing a Theravada *bhikkhuni* order within the Thai Forest *samvasa* of the late Venerable Ajahn Chah. When the matter was raised during the 2007 meeting of the WPP administrators council, the administrative and legal head monastery of the Thai Forest tradition, it was resolved that they would continue to follow the Thai Supreme Sangha Council’s edict that forbids *bhikkhus* from participating in *bhikkhuni* ordination. Ajahn Brahm then consulted the acting Sangharaja, Somdet Buddhajahn, to get his opinion on the ordination of *bhikkhunis* outside of Thailand. Somdet Buddhajahn’s response was that “Thai sangha law does not extend outside of Thailand.” Ajahn Brahm understood this to mean that it would be



Nuns from many different countries attended the Sakyadhita Conference in Vietnam

permissible to ordain nuns in Australia and decided to open up the way for *bhikkhuni* ordination after getting unanimous support from the Buddhist Society of Western Australia. He shared this intent with Ajahn Sumedho, senior abbot of Amaravati Buddhist Monastery in the U.K., as a matter of courtesy.

On October 22, 2009, four women from the Dhammasara Nun’s Monastery in Perth, Australia, became fully ordained as Theravada *bhikkhunis* at Bodhinyana Monastery via the dual ordination procedure prescribed in the Pali canon. The *bhikkhunis* were ordained first by eight qualified members of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha, with the Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka as their preceptor. Directly afterwards their ordination was confirmed by ten qualified members of the Theravada Bhikkhu Sangha, including Ajahn Brahm who participated as chanting mentor, *acariya*, thus fulfilling the qualifications for a dual ordination.

The response to the Perth ordinations was swift and draconian. On November 1, the Wat Nong Pah Pong Sangha notified Ajahn Brahm that Bodhinyana Monastery’s status as a branch monastery was being revoked. On November 4, Wat Pah Nanachat, the international Thai forest branch monastery in Thailand, released a further statement on the delisting of Ajahn Brahm. The Thai Vinaya scholar, Bhikkhu Thanissaro, was consulted to review the legality of the new ordinations. He posited that the ordinations were not legal according to Vinaya law, adding that the ordinations of the majority of *bhikkhunis* throughout the world were invalid as well. This opinion was examined by a number of Buddhist Vinaya scholars, including Bhikkhu Bodhi, Ajahn Brahm, Ajahn Sujato, Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka, and Bhikkhuni Sudhamma, who found his argument did not match the facts. In the meantime, the acting Sangharaja of Thailand, Somdet Buddhajahn, released a statement saying, “Ajahn Brahmavamsa is misrepresenting me based on his own understanding of my words.” He concluded that the ordinations were not valid and that Ajahn Brahm’s preceptor status should be considered invalid as well, thus rendering him unable to perform any further legitimate Thai Sangha ordinations.

Shortly after this ruling, a session of the Western Abbots Meeting (WAM) was held to discuss the matter. On December 11, WAM released a statement titled, “The Gathering of the Elders” which supported the view of the elder Thai forest monks. The authors did not identify themselves on the statement, but those in attendance included Ajahns Sumedho, Pasanno, Sucitto, Amaro, Munindo, Vajiro, Jayasaro, Nyanadhammo, Chandako, Sona Chandapalo, Jutindharo, Kevali, Khemasiri, Dhammasiha, Tiradhammo, and others. The statement starts by saying that it is not *bhikkhuni* ordination that is the problem, but the way Ajahn Brahm went about



Mahaprajapati, the first nun in Buddhist history

these ordinations. The paper goes on to say that perhaps *bhikkhuni* ordination is possible within this lineage, but since it has not been done in over 1000 years, we need to move slowly and show respect for our elders. At the end of the paper, those assembled endorsed the creation of an alternative to ordaining *bhikkhunis*: the *siladhara* ordination. In this system, *siladhara* nuns are required to adhere to five points, the last of which is that *siladhara* training is “not a step to a different form, such as *bhikkhuni* ordination.” The five points are:

1. The structural relationship as indicated by the Vinaya of the Bhikkhu Sangha to the Siladhara Sangha is one of seniority, such as the most junior *bhikkhu* is senior to the most senior *siladhara*. As this relationship of seniority is defined over time, it is not subject to change.
2. In line with this, in ritual situations where both *bhikkhu* and *siladhara* are present, such as giving *anumodana* and precepts, leading the chanting, or giving a talk, precedence is always presumed to rest with the senior *bhikkhu* present. He may in some cases invite a senior *siladhara* to lead. Yet if this is a regular invitation, it does not imply a new standard of shared leadership.
3. The Bhikkhu Sangha will be responsible for the *pabbajja* (ordination) the way Ajahn Sumedo has been in the past. The *siladhara* look to the Bhikkhu Sangha for ordination and guidance, rather than exclusively to Ajahn Summedo. A candidate for *siladhara* should seek approval from the Siladhara Sangha and then receive acceptance by the Bhikkhu Sangha, as represented by those *bhikkhus* who sit on the elder council.
4. The formal ritual of giving *pavarana* (invitation for feedback) by the Siladhara Sangha to the Bhikkhu Sangha should take place at the end of *vassa*, as is traditional in our communities, according to the structure of the Vinaya [Note: This excludes any possibility of the Bhikkhu Sangha inviting feedback from the Siladhara Sangha].
5. The *siladhara* training is considered to be a vehicle already suitable for the realization for liberation and is respected as such within our tradition. It is offered as a complete training as it stands and is not a step to a different form, such as *bhikkhuni* ordination.

As the winds of Buddhism flow back and forth between Asia and the West, they become infused with the western spirit of greater equity between men and women. In an era when NGO's have discovered that the best way to lift up a society is to support

its women with small loans and educational opportunities, when more and more women are taking positions of power in politics, education, business, and religion, these five points and the rejection of the *bhikkhuni* ordinations, represent an antiquated system. To simply state that, “As this relationship of seniority is defined over time, it is not subject to change,” is not a valid argument to continue a policy that has created so much suffering. The argument of those who created the five-point system is that women can become enlightened whether they are *siladharas* or *bhikkhunis* and that for women to ask for parity with their brothers is ego driven and disruptive of their equanimity and the equanimity of the community. However, an assessment of the situation by monks who are not subject to this inequity may not be fair. Most importantly, keeping women monastics unempowered affects not only female and male monastics, but also the entire culture by setting an ethical precedent for laypeople about how a husband may treat a wife, how a society may treat its women, and how girl children may be seen as having less value than boy children.

How did something as destructive as sexism make its way into the Buddha's luminous teachings? There are a number of views regarding how this happened. Many scholars believe that sexism was not implemented by the Buddha himself, but became part of Buddhism at a later date. Others make the point that the Buddha was quite revolutionary in admitting women into the Sangha at a time and place where women were considered chattel. Many of the original rules may have been made in good faith to protect women and to protect the Sangha. Perhaps some men who rose to positions of power in the Sangha were not immune to feelings of pride and entitlement. However it began, as Buddhism moves West, it enters a free society filled with men and women looking for manifest truth and highly sensitive to institutional abuses. Continuing the practice of gender discrimination while professing compassion



A Vietnamese fan dancer offers a Buddhist cultural performance

and wisdom damages Buddhism's credibility and compromises its ability to take hold in today's world. It is the living example of wisdom and compassion that draws Westerners to the Dhamma. Buddhist structures need to reflect this enlightened view.

Making the argument that Ajahn Brahm did not perform this delicate operation in the most skillful manner pales beside the fact that he had the courage to move things in a positive, forward direction. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" writes: "You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effect and does not grapple with underlying causes." Those who cry, "Foul" about the way Ajahn Brahm conducted the ordinations are missing the more important, more interesting point. Ajahn Brahm, Ajahn Sujato, and the other *bhikkhus* who invite women to join them as full participants on the spiritual path are acting out of love, the love of good brothers toward their sisters. These brothers are seeing a long-range view and are willing to put their reputations on the line for what they believe. Their good will extends to their fellow brothers who oppose their actions. Soon after the ordinations, Ajahn Brahm was asked about his response to his fellow monks. In good humor he said that this is just a bump in the road. The monks love one another; their bond is strong and this will all blow over.

Buddhism is at a turning point. The Dalai Lama said that "*Bhikkhunis* have a unique role to play in the evolution of Buddhism where the universal principle of the equality of all human beings takes precedence." Each *ajahn*, *lama*, layman, laywoman needs to think carefully about what he or she wants to leave behind for future generations. It is not easy to start a *bhikkhuni* order where there has not been one, without established monasteries for training, with very little funding, and where nuns often live far from one another. Still, the Bhikkhuni Sangha continues to grow in North America, with ordinations now taking place on Western soil in greater numbers and *bhikkhunis* gathering to support one another. The *bhikkhuni* order also continues to grow in Sri Lanka and Thailand, although *bhikkhunis* are not yet officially recognized there. Pioneering *bhikkhunis* continue to work for women in Buddhism with their hearts and with their lives, so that our girls may someday see a radiant, gentle, orange-robed woman walking down a dusty road, a campus green, or a sidewalk, and say to themselves, "How can I find this same radiance within myself?" To all the *bhikkhunis* and *siladharas* who love the Dhamma so much that they lay down their lives, so that our children may walk into a future where sisters and brothers sit side by side, harmoniously together, and to all the women and men who support them, I offer a garland of fragrant jasmine from my heart.

CARING FOR SICK NUNS

Rouli Shih

I am writing my Master's thesis about the relationship between monks and nuns and their families after they join the Buddhist monastic order in Taiwan. What I have found is that many monks and nuns need their family's support in different ways and one of these is support for medical care. Most of the monasteries provide basic living needs for their members, but not all of them provide full medical care. For this reason, some of the families of monks and nuns need to take on this responsibility, if they are willing. The problem is: What if they are unable to? Or what if sick monks



Tropical fruits and flowers make delightful offerings to the Buddha

and nuns are no longer in close contact with their family members?

There have been cases when sick monks and nuns have been asked to leave the monastery due to illness and, as a result, have become homeless. It is hard for them to make a living as a monastic in society, unless they go on the street to beg for offerings. In Taiwan, it is easier for monks to get support from laypeople than it is for nuns and I believe this is also the case elsewhere. We all know that a monastery should take care of sick Sangha members; it is their responsibility to do so. However, medical coverage for monks and nuns is not guaranteed in most monasteries. In case sick monks and nuns do not receive support from their monasteries, where can they go to ask for help?

Currently, there is one foundation in Taiwan that provides some health care services for sick monks and nuns in need. Buddhist Sangha Health Care Foundation provides the following services: Free health check-ups at different locations; Sangha medical care networks that invite hospitals, nursing homes, and sanatoriums to provide good subsidized health care services for *bhiksus* (fully ordained monks) and *bhiksunis* (fully ordained nuns); assistance to help monks and nuns pay for government health insurance, if they cannot afford to; subsidies for eyeglasses and dentures; free medical consultations; subsidies for funeral expenses; counseling services; healthcare training for volunteers who are interested in providing medical services; Sangha healthcare passports; a magazines on healthcare published every two months; and a website that provides medical information and a forum for asking medical questions.

The Buddhist Sangha Health Care Foundation was established in June 1998 by a group of respected monks, nuns, doctors, and laypeople. In addition to the services mentioned above, the

foundation is currently working on two other projects. First, they want to build a nursing home to care for both Sangha members and also Buddhist laymen (*upasakas*) and laywomen (*upasikas*). The home would provide healthy vegetarian meals for seniors and the Sangha would also get respectful care. The foundation's second project is the "Bodhi Seed Plan." *Bhiksus* and *bhikshunis* join this project as volunteers and help in their free time, if the foundation has any needs. If any monk or nun is sick, the foundation can ask a *bhiksu* or *bhikshuni* volunteer who lives nearby to help out the one who is sick. Leaders will be designated in different locations so that, even though the foundation's office is in Taipei, help can be provided to those who live in rural areas.

Personally, I think that monasteries should establish good health care systems for their members, including care for laypeople who live in the monasteries. Medical expenses are very costly. Some monasteries in Taiwan have their own medical funds and some even have funds to care for elderly residents. However, when certain monasteries cannot afford to provide medical expenses, then the Buddhist Sangha Health Care Foundation can offer to help. It is necessary not only to provide financial help to the sick, but also psychological support. The foundation provides help to monks and nuns from all traditions and monastic communities. Currently, the foundation can only provide help to monks and nuns who reside in Taiwan. If there is a similar foundation that works on the international level, then more monks and nuns who need medical help can be benefitted.

Notes:

¹ Visit www.sangha-care.org.tw (in Chinese).

² With this passport, one can get cheaper medical helps at certain hospitals or clinics.

CELEBRATING THE RELEASE OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Rebecca Paxton

On November 13, 2010, after two decades of detention, Aung San Suu Kyi appeared before thousands of her jubilant supporters. As her followers cheered, the world joined in celebrating the release of Burma's most outspoken and charismatic leader. Suu Kyi, a devout Buddhist and democracy advocate, greeted the world with a reminder that thousands of fellow citizens are still being held as political prisoners in Burma (called Myanmar by its military rulers). Her release came as a welcome crack in the wall of oppression experienced by millions of Burmese and was a cause for universal celebration.

Suu Kyi has attributed her strength in facing the years of confinement, both in prison and at home, to her daily practice of meditation and study of the *suttas*. As leader of a strong populist movement, she argues that democracy is not an imposition by the West, but is completely compatible with Burmese Buddhist tradition. Burma's population is about 90% Buddhist, with the highest proportion of monks of any country in the world.

Suu Kyi's father Aung San, architect of Burma's independence, was assassinated when she was two years old. Educated in India, where her mother served as Burmese ambassador, and later at Oxford, she married Michael Aris, a British citizen and Tibetan scholar, in 1972. She has two sons, Alexander and Kim. In 1988, she returned to Burma to nurse her dying mother and soon became engaged in a nationwide democracy uprising. In 1990, Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won the election in a landslide, but she was prevented from assuming office by the ruling dictatorship.

House arrest followed for Suu Kyi and many of her supporters.



Senior nuns in Vietnam express their devotion to the Buddha

She was released in 1995, but was told that if she left Burma to join her husband in England, she would not be allowed to return. By choosing to stay in Burma to support the aspirations of her people, she has been separated from her sons for years. Her husband died of cancer in 1999 in London without her.

Suu Kyi's release is just the beginning. Her tireless efforts continue in meetings with fellow political leaders, ambassadors, diplomats, and journalists to discuss the development of democracy in Burma. Now 65, she resumes her struggle for freedom and justice for the Burmese people in a highly charged political environment, as the country struggles with economic sanctions and a multitude of internal challenges.

Immediately upon her release, Suu Kyi called for freedom of speech and the release of 2,000 political prisoners, many of whom are monks. Her voice echoes her determination to do away with the repressive atmosphere that has dominated the lives of her fellow citizens for so many years. In a recent interview with the BBC, she said she seeks "a non-violent revolution. I don't want to see the military falling. I want to see the military rising to dignified heights of professionalism and true patriotism."

Suu Kyi's clarity of purpose shines through her writings. In *Freedom from Fear*, she defends human rights, engaged Buddhism, and the Buddhist precept to do no harm. In "Towards a True Refuge," she explores Buddhist concepts and their applicability to the Burmese way of life. Her writings, which reflect the ideas of her father and Mahatma Gandhi, present a spiritual ideology to inspire the independence of the Burmese people.

However, she refrains from identifying herself as a Buddhist politician. Instead, she prefers to be seen as a spokesperson for all peoples of all religious persuasions in her advocacy for human rights and democracy.

SAKYADHITA AT THE DMZ

G20 News from South Korea

Frank Tien (translated by Soula Lo)

While the world's political leaders come together to discuss ways to stimulate the global economy, a parallel G20 Summit Forum of Spiritual Leaders was launched recently in South Korea. The forum was hosted jointly by the Global Peace Initiative of Women (GPIW) and Women of Wisdom from Korea on the theme, "Re-envisioning Prosperity." Delegates gathered from all over the

world representing many major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Sikhism, and so on. For three days (November 10-12), representatives from various countries received a warm welcome from Korean organizations, especially from South Korean Buddhist groups, who put great effort into organizing the forum.

I attended with my wife, Dr. Christie Chang, the first day of the forum when religious leaders went to the DMZ (De-Militarized Zone) on the border between North and South Korea to hold a prayer ceremony. In individual prayers, each religious leader offered a short blessing for those who died during the Korean War. Television channels broadcast this prayer ceremony throughout South Korea the same day. Bhiksus Chang Ling and Chang Kuan from Dharma Drum Mountain in Taiwan led prayers in Chinese. After the ceremony, the international delegates went to visit Jin Kwan Sa, an ancient Korean temple, where they were warmly received and spent time appreciating South Korea's exquisite Zen Buddhist culture.

On the second day, the summit forum was officially launched at Dongguk University's main temple hall. Religious leaders delivered speeches regarding the difference between spiritual prosperity and economic prosperity, and explored what constitutes true prosperity. Faculty and students of Dongguk University participated enthusiastically. On the third day, delegates visited Hanmaum Seon Center and continued their dialogue, discussing religious issues openly. At one point, Dr. Samuel Lee, former Korean representative to the UNESCO, mentioned the high cost that South Koreans have paid for economic prosperity. In their high-speed pursuit of economic growth, young people now live in an extremely

and France, who has over 20 years of experience in interreligious dialogue, implored everyone to return to the roots of their religions and even suggested replacing religion with spirituality. He emphasized that humanity should overcome religious differences and focus on ethics and our common values in order to avoid the unnecessary disputes. This appeal also gained the attendees' unanimous approval.

Dr. Christie Chang, president of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, responded to Dr. Doudou Diene's talk, saying, "Basically, the word 'religion' in Chinese is a foreign term." She shared her experience of growing up in a multi-religious environment in Taiwan, balancing ancestor worship from traditional culture and the Christian church just next door. She learned English at the church and received the name Christie from Mormon missionaries, but was never baptized and eventually took refuge under Bhiksuni Ruimiao, the first Chinese *bhiksuni* to be teaching the Dharma in the U.S., because she found her to be a good model for practice. Dr. Chang indicated that there are some 300 million Buddhist women all over the world (this figure does not include the statistics from China and North Korea) who support basic human values such as honesty and charity. She expressed a strong wish to help these women gain access to educational opportunities and encourage them to develop their full potential as a vital contribution to world peace and understanding.

At the closing ceremony, Ms. Dena Merriam, the founder of GPIW, and Dr. Insook Kim offered an official declaration to all G20 leaders from various countries. They implored the political leaders to focus not only on the material economy, but also on balancing spirituality and economic priorities to achieve the true prosperity. GPIW also vowed to continue promoting cooperation among all religious leaders to seek a new harmonious solutions for humanity's long-term survival and prosperity.

EVERYDAY JOY

Diana Ingalls-Farrell

When you walk into the Sun Hair Salon, you will be greeted warmly by smiling Vietnamese women. One of them will serve you a hot cup of tea, sometimes with cookies. There is an atmosphere of hospitality, hard work, and happiness in the shop that makes you look forward to coming again. I am one of the lucky ones who have found this happy place. On one of my early visits, my hair dresser Yvonne noticed that I was wearing a Buddha necklace. That opened up a whole new chapter in our relationship.

We chatted about how she and her mother Tam and her three sisters – Yvette, Yvy, and Yva – had immigrated from Vietnam to Olympia, Washington in 2002. Tam's oldest daughters, Yvonne and Yvette, went to beauty school here after learning English. The youngest daughters are still in school.

Tam and her four daughters were born in Hue. In Vietnam, the family lived near a Buddhist Temple, so they went there to practice on a regular basis. Another family activity was regularly performing acts of loving kindness and compassion for people in need. This family tradition began when Tam was a child and includes Tam, her daughters, an aunt, uncle, and cousins. When they get word of an individual or group of people in critical need, they all use whatever money they can spare and any donations they can raise to buy food and deliver it to those in need. Yvy remembers when, as a small child, she watched flood waters wash away people's houses and muddy water destroyed their gardens. Although she was frightened, she was deeply moved to find that the people were so desperate, they did not even have rice to eat.



Christie Chang and Frank Tien at the DMZ

competitive environment, sometimes resulting in suicide.

Conflicts between Korean Buddhists and Christians were also discussed. A Korean Christian delegate, Dr. Chung Hyun Kyung who currently teaches at Union Theological Seminary in New York, stood up to apologize for aggressive Christians' provocative acts towards Buddhists in Korea. She stated that mutual understanding among the world's religions is the foundation for world peace and appealed to the younger generation of every religion to exchange ideas. Her speech won passionate applause from the attendees. Dr. Doudou Diene, former representative of UNESCO from West Africa

Besides providing necessities to those in need, Tam found another way to help. In Vietnam, she learned to cut hair, so when she became a single mother, she opened a small shop to support herself and her children. Many young women who wanted to learn to cut hair could not afford to get training. Tam took these young women into her home and trained them until they were ready to work on their own. She did this willingly, without financial compensation. In return, the young women helped with her four girls.

The family's dedication to helping others in Vietnam did not stop when they moved to the U.S. In fact, the circle of donors has broadened to include extended family and new friends. Once or twice a year, Tam or one of her daughters makes a trip to Vietnam to distribute food. All the money is used to buy food, because that is the most basic need. Sometimes money is sent to an aunt in Vietnam and she does the distribution. Food is distributed directly to those in greatest need, which prevents any misuse of cash.

Donations of food are distributed in several different locations that vary from year to year, based on need. The places are usually very remote and only reachable by car or van over very poor or non-existent roads. They made one donation to an elderly nun who, although not in great health herself, takes in children from families who cannot afford to keep them. Some of these children are disabled. She houses, feeds, and tries to educate them. The family also helped a destitute monk who lives in a very remote place in a simple, run-down temple. They also made donations to people in a flooded village. In a poor country like Vietnam, American dollars go a long way.

Yvy's senior-year project in high school focused on using a certain amount of money to feed as many people as possible. Following in her mother's footsteps, she wanted to put this project into action among needy people in Vietnam. She chose three groups of people to work with. First, she made and served 420 meals for men and women in a mental hospital. Second, she donated food to deaf, blind, and poor elderly people that she learned about from her aunt and uncle. Third, in another village she provided 50 children with uniforms and notebooks.

I asked whether the family ever makes donations to repair buildings for these various groups and the answer was that they mainly provide food, so that they can benefit needy families directly. Tam and her family do not limit their loving kindness to Vietnam. They also donate to the poor in the U.S. They have set up a small clothing distribution program. After collecting donations of clothing from customers and friend, they put bags full of clothes outside their shop for the homeless and whoever might need them. Whatever clothes remain are sorted out, washed, packed up, and sent to Vietnam.

Tam wants to be clear that, although she helps others as much as she can, she has also received significant help herself. Her American

husband Dwight was willing to help her and her daughters immigrate to the U.S. and open their shop.

When I asked whether other Vietnamese families are doing similar charity work, they said they don't know of any, but hope they exist. The most moving aspect of the family's acts of loving kindness is that helping others is a natural part of their everyday life. To quote Tam, "I don't want to be famous. As long as I have health and a job, I will help as much as I can, because it brings me great happiness."

DHARMA TRANSLATION RETREAT AT YONG MING TEMPLE

Yu-chen Li

The Taiwan Branch of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women held a Dharma Translation Retreat from August 14 to 16, 2009, at Yong Ming Temple on Mt. Yangming near Taipei. The retreat was sponsored by Yong Ming Temple at Yangming Shan, Hsuan-miao Cultural and Educational Foundation, and Bodhi Foundation. Altogether 31 people registered for the three-day session.

Of the participants who completed the camp, 16 expressed a wish to serve as English translators for the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The retreat helped prepare them to assist Chinese-languages speakers from Taiwan and elsewhere with written translation, oral interpretation, and other needed assistance during the conference. At the conclusion of the translation retreat, "graduates" established their own Dharma Translation Association. Members plan to meet monthly to interact and continue their training as Dharma translators.



Sakyadhita Taiwan's dedicated Chinese translation team

The nuns of Yong Ming Temple praised the hard work of the retreat participants and urged them to pray for the victims of Typhoon Morakot. Participants, in turn, expressed their deep gratitude to the nuns for their warm hospitality during the retreat. The selection of Yong Ming Temple as the location for the Translation Retreat was significant. The temple was the location of the Lotus Ashram founded by Ven. Shig Hui Wan, a pioneer of the Buddhist women's movement in Taiwan.

Sakyadhita Taiwan plans to hold more retreats and other activities in the future, so that Buddhist women in Taiwan can receive the written and oral translation services they need to share their rich knowledge of Buddhism. Dharma translation retreats will also prepare Buddhist women from Taiwan to participate in international conferences and enable them to share their experience and wisdom with a larger audience.

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A blog called Sakyadhita Bridging Worlds: The Dharma Translators' Network and an email list were created following the retreat. The link to the blog is: <http://blog.udn.com/sbwtaiwan>. Anyone interested in Dharma translation, especially between English and Chinese, is welcome to visit the blog and join the email list. Please contact sakyadhita@gmail.com if you have any questions.

One of the most significant goals of Sakydhita Taiwan is to promote international cooperation by cultivating English-Chinese translators for Buddhist events and publications. From September 3 to 6, 2010, we participated as part of an international translation team at the Huayan Forum on Globalization in Taipei. Sakydhita's translation workshop last summer and the experience gained by translating at the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference in Vietnam prepared us for this task. The Huayan Forum, which was the first time that we had translated professionally, publicly announced our commitment to serve in the internationalization of Buddhism.

After careful consideration, Sakydhita Taiwan decided to charge a fee for translation and moderate the workshops on a volunteer basis. The fee, which was 50 percent of the standard fee in Taiwan, was used to help make Sakydhita Taiwan financially self-sufficient. Gradually Buddhists in Taiwan are coming to realize that translating Dharma requires professionally trained translators. Some Buddhists in Taiwan do not realize how difficult it is to translate Buddhist teachings and talks, due to the specialized terminology and philosophical distinctions involved. Since speakers often turn in their papers just before the conference opens, there is no time to translate them beforehand and simultaneous interpretation is needed. This forum also included a business meeting, which required accurate and timely communications. The organizers of this international forum greatly appreciated our translation services.

Christie Chang has been the key person in organizing the Sakydhita Taiwan translation team. Her personal charisma, communication skills, and networking experience helped create the team. She is also a popular speaker and the Sakydhita workshop that she presented attracted enthusiastic participation. The format developed by the Sakydhita Taiwan translation team, in which the interpreter also serves as the panel moderator, is now being used by other Buddhist organizations in Taiwan.

Sakydhita Taiwan has volunteered its services at many Buddhist conferences. Now, by taking on organizational responsibilities as well as translating, more and more people are learning about Sakydhita. The Sakyadhita Taiwan translation team also inspires awareness of the importance of women's participation in Buddhist conferences. At the Huayan Forum, the hosts acceded to our requirement to invite more women speakers. On a more subtle level, the talks of all the male speakers were translated by female voices, which was a new experience for many monks. A few nuns and women scholars immediately began picking up on gender issues on the spot, which sparked discussion among them.

For me, the most moving part of working with the Sakydhita Taiwan translation team is its strong commitment to volunteer work. Members of the team made many sacrifices to prepare for their translation duties: taking leave from their jobs, jeopardizing pay increases, and even taking additional classes to prepare themselves for translation work.

Very often at Buddhist conferences, it is overwhelmingly women who work behind the scenes serving tea and ensuring that the conference is successful, while men dominate the microphone. Although women donate substantial amounts of time, money, and

energy, their voices are rarely heard. By offering excellent, careful translation, the Sakydhita Taiwan translation team is opening new doors for women's participation and creating new paths to authentically practice the Dharma.



A workshop on Buddhist organizational management with Roseanne Freese

BOOK REVIEWS

Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns.
 Edited by Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedroen. Boston: Wisdom, 2010.
 Reviewed by Carol L. Winkelmann.

Given equal opportunities for education and ordination, women promise to become pillars of the tradition, bringing many benefits to Buddhist societies and to human society as a whole. Recognizing full ordination for women is not only a matter of social justice, it is also simply a matter of common sense.

(Karma Lekshe Tsomo, p. 289)

In 2007, the International Congress on Women's Role in the Sangha was convened by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, to discuss the full ordination of Buddhist nuns in the Tibetan and Theravada traditions. The conference, heralded as an historic moment in Buddhism, was held at Hamburg University in Germany. It was attended by nearly 400 religious leaders, monastics, and scholars from 19 countries. *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nuns* is a collection of 17 essays culled from the 65 presentations delivered at the conference. It addresses critical historical and philosophical issues that the *bhiksuni* (fully ordained nun) movement faces in these two traditions where nuns, no matter how educated or enlightened, may never achieve novice status.

Monastic women desiring full ordination have faced problems varying by lineage and location. The Bhiksuni Sangha vanished in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal in the 11th century. Burma may have had lineages for fully ordained women that, lamentably, now are also gone. There is no evidence of lineages of fully ordained women in Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Thailand, or Tibet. Fortunately, Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese lineages survived. They follow the Dharmaguptaka tradition of Vinaya disciplinary rules for the formation and sustenance of monastic lineages. But the Vinaya cannot easily be transferred to those locations where the lineage died out or never existed – the Theravada and Mulasarvastivada transmission lineages of the Theravadins and Tibetans, respectively. Clearly, Buddhist women in those traditions who desire full ordination face serious obstacles.

The ordination movement began in Bodhgaya, India, in 1987. A gathering of nuns, laywomen, and allies discussed the dire

situation of Buddhist nuns, including the ordination issue, and other issues critical to the well-being of Buddhist women. The group recognized that, in its aspirations, Buddhism seeks the liberation and enlightenment for all, yet patriarchal attitudes and beliefs have kept Buddhist women from participating fully in religious, educational, and other aspects of institutional life. This disparity is obviously an obstacle for women monastics; in contemporary times, it has become an embarrassment for everyone.

In *Dignity & Discipline*, contributors assume that the challenges will be cleared. They offer compelling arguments with respect to issues needing to be settled before nuns in the Tibetan and Theravada traditions may be fully ordained. With palpable sincerity, intellectual profundity, and often striking candor, they have shown religious leaders how, in Janet Gyatso's words, "...to create the future toward which we are moving." (p. 3) The ordination movement will gather strength from their efforts in this anthology.

The vision set forth in *Dignity & Discipline* is stunning in its scope. The restoration of the Sangha of both fully ordained male and female monastics promises a better future not simply for Buddhist women, but for everyone. This theme opens and closes the anthology. In "Female Ordination in Buddhism: Looking Into a Crystal Ball, Making a Future," Gyatso points to the restoration of full ordination of women, an "ineluctable movement across Buddhism," as an issue sitting squarely within a global context. A fully restored Sangha has the potential to "advance discussions about problems that are not exclusively Buddhist, but concern the rest of the world as well." (p. 2) These she elaborates as the potential of women monastics to influence global concerns such as sectarian violence, the increasing competition for scarce resources, and the need for peace and wisdom.

To some, such hopeful opportunities appear contingent on the willingness of religious leaders to strongly and publicly support the *bhiksuni* movement by surmounting the legal and historical issues that have thus far impeded it. Yet mass consensus can trump the legal and historical issues. In places such as Sri Lanka, there is now a favorable consensus among the laity for fully ordained nuns – though most religious leaders withheld support when ten nuns (whose Theravada lineage had vanished) negotiated the challenges – primarily the required number of fully ordained female monastics needed to confer full ordination. The group did this in 1996 in Sarnath, India, with the assistance of Korean nuns and monks in the very closely related Dharmaguptaka lineage. The ordinations of more than 500 *bhiksunis* have since followed. A communion of courageous monastics and progressive laity is moving the Sangha forward into modernity.

By stepping up to the legal and historical challenges, Sangha elders could assume their full leadership role. Contributors to *Dignity and Discipline* show them the path by taking on these challenges.

Legal issues curtailing the aspirations of Buddhist women include the "Eight Heavy Rules" (*gurudharmas*) present in all versions of the Vinaya. Ostensibly formulated by Buddha when women were allowed into the early sangha 2,500 years ago, these rules institutionalize the subordination of female monastics to male monastics, despite – for example – nuns' seniority or experience. Such overt discrimination is not well accepted in modernity and it will not facilitate the role that Buddhism is poised to assume on the world stage – that is, as a religion of peace and justice in a world fraught with prejudice and violence. Indeed, in "The Eight *Garudhammas*," Üte Hüsken uncovers evidence that the rules may have been added in the editorial process of later male monastics. (p. 144) The Enlightened One assuredly was too wise for such gender discrimination.



Newly ordained Siksamana Damchö Drolma at Yi Yuan Temple in Taiwan

In "Sects and Sectarianism," Bhikku Sujato points out that the three surviving Vinayas are closely related. Plainly, the differences are not significant. In a beautiful emendation of the habitual thought that Vinaya integrity would be compromised by Dharmaguptaka *bhiksunis* assisting in Theravadin and Tibetan ordinations (until those traditions can manage on their own), Sujato reminds us that, rather, it would be an "expansion of our communion to better reflect both our shared past and also our shared future as custodians of the Dhamma in this small world." (p. 37)

Indeed, as Jen-Uwe Hartmann reminds us in "The Vinaya between History and Modernity," the legal issues, such as whether monks alone can ordain nuns, will not be resolved by consulting the Vinayas texts. (p. 26) Buddhism has always been pragmatic, however. Expedient changes to rules and regulations have occurred often throughout its history. Even the integrity of monks' lineages cannot be proven definitively through historical evidence: Monks may have been ordained without strict regard to regulations as circumstances prescribed.

If the law now is changed authoritatively, then the procedure for nuns' ordination will be as good as previous procedures. This is argued convincingly by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch in "Bhiksuni Ordination: Lineages and Procedures as Instruments of Power." (p. 242) Sobisch enumerates the various methods by which the Sangha establishes and sustains authority and he argues that it can do so in historically precedented ways to reestablish full ordination.

Lobsang Dechen reminds us too that the *geshe* and *khenpo* degrees (the highest degrees in Buddhist philosophy) are contingent upon the ability to study Vinaya, which only fully ordained monastics may do beyond an introductory level. (p. 208-9) In "Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha," Dechen strongly asserts that full ordination is not being pursued to gain status or power for nuns (as opponents often claim), but to allow them to become fully qualified to teach and preserve the Dharma. Without the right to receive the highest teachings, women cannot fulfill their wish "to work sincerely for the benefit of the Buddhadharma and of all beings throughout the world." (p. 209)

In "Gender Equity and Human Rights," Karma Lekshe Tsomo makes the cogent point that to deny women full ordination is to deny them full human rights. Gender equity is a principle of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and U.N. Resolution 1325. Worldwide, Buddhists "contend that Buddhism is an equal opportunity religion and proudly declare that enlightenment is available to everyone, whether female or male." (p. 283) It is a rude awakening when the practitioner realizes the contradiction between rhetoric and reality, a reality that does not mesh with either Buddhist or U.N. principles. Lekshe Tsomo challenges not

only religious leaders, but all of us: "Compassionate individuals have a responsibility to wake up and speak out in order to help correct social injustices" (p. 288).

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has spoken out again and again in support of the full ordination movement. In "Human Rights and the Status of Women in Buddhism," he lifts up once more the important role of women monastics as models and peacemakers in difficult contemporary times. He agrees with other contributors that the remaining question is how to effect the *bhiksuni's* full ordination, not whether nuns should be ordained. Yet he emphasizes that, in this matter, he cannot act without the consensus of senior Tibetan monks. Therefore, he calls for more dialogue in the effort to develop a majority consensus among monastic elders and the Tibetan community as a whole. (p. 277) Meanwhile, the entire community is enjoined by His Holiness to acknowledge Tibetan nuns who have already taken vows in the Dharmaguptaka lineage. Opponents have, of course, challenged their motives and authenticity. Meanwhile, the Sangha can translate important ritual practices from the Dharmaguptaka lineage into Tibetan, so that Tibetan nuns who are now novices may begin to practice as a Bhiksuni Sangha. These rituals are the three primary monastic activities: ordination, rituals marking the beginning and end of the rainy season, and bi-monthly recitations of the *Pratimoksa Sutra*.

These are only some of the fine qualities of this anthology. The Hamburg conference marked a critical moment in Buddhist history and the publication of *Dignity & Discipline* skillfully captures the heart of the moment. Volume editors Bhiksuni Jampa Tsedroen, a lecturer in Buddhist Philosophy at Hamburg University, and Thea Mohr, a lecturer in religious studies at Goethe University in Frankfurt, have put together a tremendous resource. This anthology details the shortcomings of opponents' legal and historical arguments and it promulgates the strengths of the pragmatic, compassionate, and visionary standpoints of supporters. Offering readers useful clarification of the complex issues involved, it serves as source of knowledge and inspiration for those who want "to wake up and speak out" for social justice by walking in solidarity with our Buddhist sisters who wish for full ordination.

In this effort, Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women has been unparalleled. Founded by Karma Lekshe Tsomo and others in 1987 from that small Bodhgaya gathering, Sakyadhita, ("Daughters of the Buddha") has transformed into an alliance of monastic and laywomen from Asia and the West – an unprecedented pan-Buddhist movement that represents some 300 million Buddhist women worldwide. Sakyadhita International's bi-annual conferences, newsletter, and other forums have helped women worldwide to question the gender discrimination within Buddhism that rends a gap between its teachings and its practice. Sakyadhita USA promises to be an important part of this peace and justice effort. Our new national branch walks shoulder-to-shoulder with our Asian sisters as we envision a new and better future for Buddhism. In our efforts, we can look confidently forward to the time when full ordination for women will be achieved.

This is the vision offered by *Dignity & Discipline*. There are many compelling moments in the anthology, but Gyatso puts the matter concisely and well: "It is important to know," she writes, "how the [world] will be different when we have a visible and powerful presence of esteemed women taking on the ancient Buddhist role of the fully ordained monastic, a role that stands for exceptional dignity, discipline and wisdom." (p. 3)

Carol L. Winkelmann is a professor at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, where she teaches linguistics and language courses, including *Anthropological Linguistics and Women & Sacred Language*. Her

publications include *Survivor Rhetoric and The Language of Battered Women: A Rhetorical Analysis of Personal Theologies*. Winkelmann makes frequent trips to north India, where she is researching Tibetan Buddhist nuns. She is on the organizing committee of Sakyadhita USA and is co-founder of the Cincinnati KKSG, a Karma Kagyu study group.

Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns.

By Elise Anne DeVido. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pp. 206. Reviewed by Grace Schireson

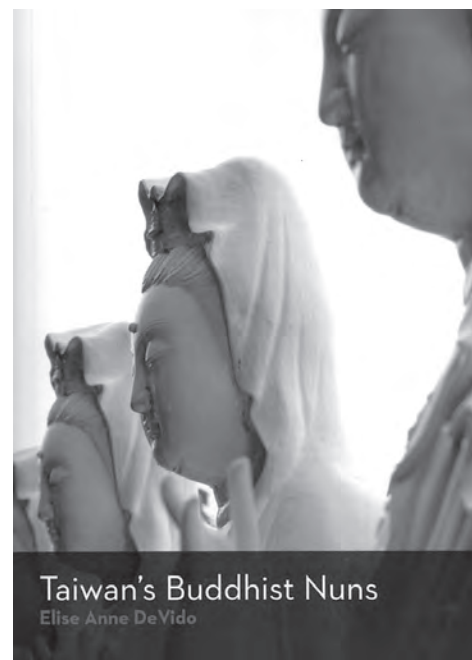
Taiwanese nuns are unique in the world of Buddhism, outnumbering monks approximately three to one. Elise DeVido's *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*, gives us an inside view of these remarkable women's practice. Based on years of research and fieldwork, she explains this phenomenon by giving us a close view of the nuns, their practices, and their place in society. From this vantage point, we can explore specific examples of Taiwanese nuns' practice intimately examining important questions about women's rights, Buddhist women and social change, and the opportunities and limitations that women face as Buddhist teachers.

American readers will discover that DeVido's book extends beyond her subjects and their location. Her work is relevant and timely, as women explore their roles within Buddhism. Readers far beyond the borders of Taiwan will see how women are empowered by the values they bring to both Buddhism and society in general.

The book's overview of Buddhist history in Taiwan helps to contextualize the historical, political, economic,

and religious circumstances in which Taiwanese nuns and lay practitioners have become so successful. After the defeat of the Nationalist Chinese government in 1949, Taiwan gradually made the transition to democracy. Significant changes in public education influenced women's opportunities and aspirations for ordination. The Buddhist nuns who left Communist China were welcomed, educated, and formally trained as a way to preserve Buddhist practice through a difficult and politically unsettled period. Rather than keeping women in the background in Buddhist institutions, nuns were encouraged to learn the rituals and practices necessary for temple leadership.

With enhanced opportunities for education and formal training, nuns in Taiwan now lead important Buddhist institutions. Their work is greatly influential in Buddhist practice circles and creates positive social change throughout Taiwan. In general, Taiwanese nuns aspire to the traditional *bodhisattva* ideal – the Buddhist archetype of one who frees others from suffering, not only as a spiritual leader, but



“in the human realm.” This means, for example, that the *bodhisattva* does not just offer prayers for well-being after an earthquake, but also feeds and houses survivors and rebuilds their schools.

The accomplishments and example of female Buddhist masters has encouraged many more women to become ordained or to become more actively involved as laywomen. Thus, highly visible, empowered female Buddhist masters have transformed the image of women in Taiwan. By skillfully embodying both the modern and the traditional face of Taiwan, women manage to be traditional and radical at the same time, gaining them both acceptance and popularity. Through modeling the *bodhisattva* ideal, Taiwanese nuns are defining what it means to be a Taiwanese woman.

Historically, women have been strong supporters of religious practice, but Taiwanese female Buddhist masters have activated their potential and become acknowledged leaders in both formal teaching settings and beyond. DeVido offers portraits of leading Taiwanese female Buddhist masters and their work: Master Zhengyan who developed “Project Hope” for disaster relief, Master Wu Yin who emphasizes academic and formal training for nuns, and Master Chao Hwei who found the *bodhisattva* path in social activism. She describes the work of nuns who provide services to the community, including some who view social welfare activities as an opportunity to propagate Buddhism. She discusses nuns who advocate for change politically and those who work for change quietly. Despite their differences, the nuns share a belief in a life-affirming Buddhism that is helpful in this human realm, rather than abstract concepts of compassion or salvation in some other realm. In Taiwan, Buddhist laywomen’s participation is strongly encouraged, yielding enormous benefit to the Buddhist movement and becoming a rich source of empowerment for Taiwanese laywomen.

Exploring women’s leadership in Taiwan requires differentiating women’s empowerment and feminism. DeVido discusses both these methods of supporting and expanding women’s rights. Working for political rights is not enough; women may enjoy legal rights and economic privileges, but still disparage their own abilities relative to men. Ciji Compassion-Relief Foundation, led by Bhiksuni Zhengyan, promotes a “harmonious” approach. While the status of nuns is elevated by this organization, women’s rights in the Western sense are not emphasized. This means that women may be asked to accept and practice compassion in situations that feminists might find intolerable. For example, a woman may be encouraged by the Ciji nuns to offer continued loving kindness to a husband having an extra-marital affair and to practice compassion for his mistress.

Taiwanese nuns, DeVido explains, often overlook the feminist influence on their own success. The nuns “cited their own hard work and essentialist notions of gender rather than credit the struggles of the feminist movement to explain the nuns’ ‘success.’” (p. 26) DeVido’s nuanced view highlights the difference between “relational feminism,” which predominated in the West prior to 1900 and pointed out the special qualities women bring to society, and “liberal feminism,” which emphasizes equal rights for women in the workplace and women’s human rights in society. This distinction explains the important choices women face in balancing relationships and social empowerment.

DeVido also discusses how the Taiwanese nuns work with and challenge the Eight Special Rules that originated in early Buddhism. These Eight Special Rules prescribe a subordinate position for the most senior nuns relative to the most junior monks. These rules have limited the nuns’ independence across continents and millennia. While Taiwanese nuns take a variety of approaches to the Eight Special Rules, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei has led a movement to abolish them. She “wants nuns to face the fact that the Eight Special Rules perpetuate arrogance and pretensions to special privileges among

monks, while continuing tendencies of self-deprecation and deference to male authority among nuns.” Such an acknowledgment, DeVido says, could provide tremendous healing and significantly increase Buddhism’s worldwide credibility. At the same time, abolishing the Eight Special Rules would seriously challenge international Buddhist institutions and their power structures. In this respect, Taiwanese nuns and their activities may have influence far beyond Taiwan.

DeVido’s modern history of the nuns in Taiwan explains how women’s practice is changing to incorporate more formal training, education, and experience as Dharma teachers. American readers will need even more grounding in Buddhist history to appreciate that the prevalence and power of nuns in Taiwan represents a radical departure from the norm. One of the strengths of DeVido’s book is its firsthand accounts of Taiwan’s Buddhist nuns, which reveal a variety of ways to provide leadership and act as a catalyst for positive social change.



Grace Schireson is a Zen abbess, leading the Central Valley Zen Foundation in California. She is also a clinical psychologist and president of the Shogaku Zen Institute, a Zen Buddhist training seminary where senior Zen practitioners learn the necessary ministerial and counseling skills for teaching Buddhist practice in community settings. Schireson is also a board member for the newly-formed Sakyadhita USA and the author of Zen Women: Beyond Tea Ladies, Iron Maidens, and Macho Masters (www.zenwomen.org).

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROAD TO TAIWAN’S BUDDHIST NUNS

Elise Anne DeVido

“Now I see. I venture onto paths whose entrances are obscured by overgrown vegetation, for adventure, to test myself, to make myself grow into a better person.”

During New Year 2000, I attended my first Sakyadhita conference in Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of the Buddha. This was a turning point for me in many ways. There I met Bhiksuni Karma Lekshe Tsomo and many other dedicated scholars and practitioners. I learned about the various projects of Buddhist women around the world, women from all backgrounds. In Lumbini, I stopped crying and started living again.

There is always a new beginning, like walking along a curved road, but we only discover that by looking back at the journey. My journey began before the conference in Lumbini, when I sought refuge in a small Buddhist temple on a cliff above the sea. Lingjiushan’s temple was built above the sea in Fulong, on the

northern coast of Taiwan. 1998 was a very bad year. It saw the end of my marriage, an awful custody struggle over my son, and total betrayal by my best friend. But that temple above the sea was "... where the sound of the bell and drum and the warmth of many red candles vanquished the raw winter dark." That was the beginning of my true awareness of Buddhism. There began my refuge, the medicine to cure my life's ills.

However, the book that has shaped my life for more than a decade began even before that, in 1996, when my college students at National Chengchi University and I visited the Luminary Buddhist Institute and temple complex for nuns in southern Taiwan. At that time, I knew very little about Buddhism in Taiwan or life in a monastic setting. Together, for the first time, the students and I experienced the disciplined and rigorous schedule of a working monastery.

The simplicity – the wooden bed with only a coverlet for a mattress, the wooden clapper waking us long before sunrise, the incomparable sounds of the bell and drum in the pure morning air, morning chores, the vegetarian food – was refreshing. The contrasts held us in suspension – the relentless mosquitoes and heat, the red phoenix and white wild ginger flowers, the mangoes and guavas of Jiayi in southern Taiwan.

The Luminary Buddhist Institute is home to a community of nuns with impressive talents and varying temperaments. They work and practice together as an organic whole. I did not know it then, but three years later I would begin formal research on what would eventually result in the book, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*.

Though I had studied Chinese history and language in college and graduate school, my research topics had been unrelated to Taiwan, Buddhism, or nuns. On the contrary, my dissertation was on the Shandong Communist Movement of 1923-52 and the major source materials were in Taiwan's libraries and archives. My even deeper link to Taiwan was through my former husband, a Taiwanese architect whom I met and married in 1988 while in graduate school. Less than one year later, our son was born. In 1995, I obtained my doctorate and went to Taiwan with my husband and son. I had planned to revise my dissertation, but for my son's sake, I did not dare stay in China for long periods to do archival research and fieldwork. Instead, as director of a study-abroad program in Taipei, I arranged field trips to cultural and religious sites in Taiwan and to the Luminary Buddhist Institute. We visited Beigang's Matzu festival that honors the popular goddess of the sea, a Daoist temple's rededication ceremony in Jilong City, and Longshan Temple in the old trade town of Lugang. These trips sparked my interest in Buddhist history and its contemporary development in Taiwan.

In 1999, when I began my job as a researcher at the Taipei Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies, the director suggested that I write a few articles about Buddhism in Taiwan and about nuns, in particular. Nuns outnumber monks in Taiwan and are well known for their contributions to society and culture in Taiwan and abroad. Thereupon, I interviewed Master Wu Yin of Luminary Buddhist Institute (chapter five) and her nuns numerous times, made many contacts, and spoke with nuns of many different backgrounds and missions. I gained strength from seeing many groups of

self-sufficient, talented women engaged in projects ranging from research and education to art, publishing, charity, medical care, human rights, animal rights, and care for the environment. Even more so, I gained strength from seeing the grace and strength of nuns in their yellow and orange robes during morning and evening services sending out their compassion to all sentient beings.

To me, these nuns are the embodiment of *zhuangyan*, "splendid sublime qualities – bright pure wisdom – of the Buddha." The nuns plunge right into the stream of life and death and see it clearly. The nuns also embody the Buddhist ideal of *zizai* (Sanskrit: *vasita*). *Zizai* in its non-Buddhist meaning is unfettered and natural. To Buddhists it means even more: to be unrestrained by worries, so that one's mind is free and unobstructed. Without barriers, one's actions of body and mind are boundless. This power or mastery is attributed to all Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Though I believed I could never be like them, with all my faults and weaknesses, the nuns showed me ideals to aspire to. I am on a path to somehow transfer the harmony, joy, and balance I felt in the Buddha hall into myself.

During my research, I also paid many visits to the headquarters and various branches of Ciji Buddhist group in Taiwan. Although Bhiksuni Zhengyan made me feel at once awed and nervous, she taught me much about Buddhism, what is important in this life, and how to practice the *bodhisattva* path. There is so much to admire about Ciji's enormous accomplishments, yet I felt too much pressure to conform to the group identity and culture. The experience was informative and inspiring, but it was difficult for

me to feel *zizai*. By contrast, meetings and talks with Bhiksuni Chao Hwei and Bhiksuni Heng Ching were joyous, energizing, and conveyed to me *zizai*.

Researching and writing this book took great discipline. There were many complications as I stood between cultures, societies, and religions. For one, I was trained as a historian of modern Chinese history, but to write this book, I needed to become acquainted with Buddhist studies, women's studies, and gender studies, as well as learn to conduct interviews and organize fieldwork notes. It was difficult for me to navigate the participant-

observer identities and to maintain the "proper" tone and stance of a scholar, especially after I became a Buddhist myself. I could draw upon my personal experiences of many years of living and working in Taiwan, during which there were many joyous moments. However, scars remained from my years as a failed *da sao*, the wife of the eldest son of a Chinese family whom I felt deeply resented and rejected me. I had to face the love-hate relationship I had with Chinese culture and still write this book with unflinching clarity.

While attending a conference in Tokyo in March 2005, I stayed at a stark guesthouse where I was the only guest, far from the conference venue. It was lonely and cold, both day and night. There, I received an email from the publisher that had been considering my manuscript of *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*. More or less it read, "Sorry I didn't get back to you sooner. I've received the readers' responses. One reader loved your manuscript, but the other hated it. In this publishing climate, I cannot see taking this risk. Maybe you can try non-academic presses. Good luck." This struck me down with a migraine in full force, with constant pain,



vomiting, and dizziness so serious that I could not get out of bed. There was no one to help me, and I almost missed the plane back to Taiwan. The road had turned to despair... for a time.

A month later, out of the blue, SUNY Press asked to see my completed manuscript. When I sent it in, all 230 pages, as an email attachment, I felt as if a huge stone had dropped off my back and into the deep ocean. More than a year later, the outside readers' reports were positive and recommended publishing the manuscript with revisions. That day, the day of the winter solstice, the sun shone like the height of summer. A month later, I received the contract. Although I knew that the revision process would not be easy, I felt that SUNY had faith in me, even if I had little faith in myself.

In August 2007, a local friend and I drove in a jeep for over four hours up, down, and along dizzy winding roads through thick tropical foliage to Nantou County in central Taiwan. We went to visit some schools that had been destroyed by the devastating 1999 earthquake and then rebuilt by the Taiwanese Buddhists of Ciji. Our first stop was the rural town of Jiji, the town that was the epicenter of the quake, which had been virtually leveled. But when we arrived, we found that the buildings had been restored and the streets were crowded with tourists. There was no visible trace of the earthquake. It was the height of the summer swelter, but we rented bikes and rode at top speed, no hands, down the hill, through tunnels of trees, and past the fruit orchards. Finally, we stopped at Yanping Primary School. I wanted to take a photo of the ingenious "Buddha hand," a massive stone sculpture designed as a slide for children. But the hand of the Buddha was very large. With my camera, I hopped around in the broiling noontime sun trying to capture the massive hand, but there was no suitable angle that could contain the whole thing. I considered climbing a tree or the school roof. We laughed like school children and felt the impossible weight of loss and hope. It was impossible to climb up high enough to see the hand, which was just part of the whole. Still, frustration, exasperation, physical discomfort, worries, and obstacles faded in the contemplation of the Buddha's hand.

The revisions took me another three and a half years, but they were years of inspiration. My research on Buddhist nuns in Taiwan led me to many new research interests, including the influence of the Chinese Buddhist reformer Taixu (a monk who promoted nuns' education) on modern Buddhism in Vietnam. Now I am working on the origins of Thich Nhat Hanh's Engaged Buddhism and, most recently, on nuns in modern Vietnam. I am fortunate to have made over 12 research trips to various regions and institutes throughout Vietnam, a country that has fascinated me since childhood. All of these projects concern topics that have been neglected by scholars and require many trips into the unknown. Now I venture onto paths whose entrances are obscured by overgrown vegetation for adventure, to test myself and make myself grow into a better person.

Sometimes the road is uphill, requiring patience and equanimity. But when I presented my book to Bhiksuni Zhengyan in July 2010, at her headquarters in Hualien, Taiwan, she was pleased and asked me when the Chinese version would be available. I also gratefully presented copies to Bhiksuni Chao Hwei and Bhiksuni Wu Yin. The process of writing this book was depressing and exhilarating. Along the way, I became a vegetarian and vowed to devote more time and energy to Buddhist practice. I made wonderful Buddhist friends in Taiwan, such as Christie Chang, Yuchen Li, Wei-yi Cheng, Hwei-syin Lu, Bhiksuni Heng Ching, and Bhiksuni Chao Hwei. These Buddhist women are all my teachers. Together with many other Buddhist women in Taiwan, we worked to found Sakyadhita Taiwan.

I now live and work in the U.S., but several times a day I think of my friends in Taiwan. I remember the mountains, the sea, and

the ever-changing colors of the sky on that beautiful island where fragrant flowers are always blooming. I have learned to trust other people again, go deeper into friendships, and dare show my true face and heart to others. I am happy and honored to be part of the committee to form Sakyadhita USA and wish everyone peace and joy on our paths. This book, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*, is my gift to you, in gratitude!

Elise A. DeVido is a founding member of Sakyadhita Taiwan. She now teaches World History and East Asian History at St. Bonaventure University in New York State and is researching Buddhism in 20th-century Vietnam.

HISTORIC SIKSAMANA ORDINATION

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

On November 7, 2010, six American and European Buddhist nuns practicing in the Tibetan tradition received siksamana ordination in a solemn ceremony at Yi Yuan Temple in Taipei. The ceremony was organized with the help of Bhiksuni Heng-ching, the Committee for Bhikshuni Ordination, and Sakyadhita International. In accordance with an ancient tradition, the six nuns will keep the precepts for two years in preparation for receiving full *bhiksuni* ordination. In addition to strengthening the nuns' personal dedication and monastic discipline, the ordination contributes momentum to the global movement to revive full ordination for Buddhist women. Since these nuns are students of Tibetan teachers, their ordination also spurs the movement to introduce full ordination for women in the Tibetan tradition.



There are seven categories of *pratimoksha* precepts that are considered a life-long commitment: *bhikshu* (fully ordained monk), *bhikshuni* (fully ordained nun), *sramanera* (novice monk), *sramanerika* (novice nun), *siksamana* (probationary nun), *upasaka* (layman), and *upasika* (laywoman). An eighth type of precepts (*upavasatha*) are taken by laypeople who observe eight precepts for 24 hours. At present, nuns of the Tibetan tradition observe the precepts of a *sramanerika* (novice). If they wish to receive higher ordination, they must apply to receive it outside their own tradition, as many western nuns have done.

The *siksamana* ordination involves observing six key precepts: to refrain from killing, stealing, sexual activity, false speech, alcohol, and untimely food. Keeping these precepts strictly for two years helps test a nun's suitability and commitment to monastic life and also provides an opportunity for in-depth monastic training. The fact that monks do not have an equivalent two-year probationary period has raised questions about gender equity in Buddhism. As traditionally explained, the two-year probationary period was instituted for women to ensure that they were not pregnant before joining the monastic community. The fact that human gestation generally requires only nine months, not two years, has not escaped notice.

Currently, the Bhiksuni Sangha flourishes in Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam, China, and in the Buddhist diaspora around the world. There are now thousands of fully ordained Buddhist nuns in these countries. Since the 1970s, nuns in Taiwan have graciously assisted dozens of nuns from traditions that lack a Bhiksuni Sangha to receive full ordination. The six nuns, four from France and two from the United States, journeyed to Taiwan especially to receive the siksamana ordination that will prepare them for full ordination in two years. Although the nuns have all been ordained as novices for years and have received excellent training in their home monasteries, they decided to undergo this special ordination process as a step toward making the ordination available to others. The four nuns from France are students of Sogyal Rinpoche,

The six nuns who received ordination expressed their profound appreciation for the opportunity to train at a monastery for nuns in Taiwan. Despite the strict discipline, which includes not even killing a mosquito, they deeply appreciated the warm-hearted generosity they received from the Taiwanese nuns at Yi Yuan Temple. Few equivalent nunneries exist outside of Asia, so although the schedule is rigorous and discipline is strict, the experience of living in a large supportive community of nuns is a very special opportunity. All six nuns found the experience very educational and inspiring.

As the ceremonies proceeded, all involved were conscious of the historic import of the occasion. The primary reason for seeking siksamana ordination was, of course, to become the best nuns they can be. If receiving the ordination will also help to advance the cause of nuns in the Tibetan tradition, however, the nuns will be very happy. Winning acceptance for higher ordination for women will require winning the hearts and minds of conservative critics who oppose the ordination. Fine points of Vinaya are being unearthed to bolster the opposition. Despite the support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama for the establishment of a Bhiksuni Sangha in the Tibetan tradition, a campaign to discredit those in favor of the ordination is widespread in India and Nepal. Regardless, by journeying to Taiwan to receive siksamana ordination, six brave nuns have taken a major step forward. Buddhists around the world rejoice in the merit of these nuns and those who supported their dedication. Hopefully, the causes and conditions for opening these opportunities for others will soon come together.

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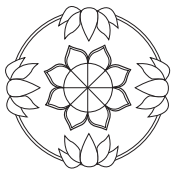
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