



# sakyadhita

15<sup>th</sup> international conference on buddhist women  
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## PANEL PRESENTATIONS

### Bridging Scholarship and Dharma at Sakyadhita

*Amy Langenberg and Vanessa R. Sasson*

Sakyadhita is a courageous idea. It creates a space for Buddhist women to talk, negotiate, and challenge. It shines a light on injustice and it supports the commitment women are making all over the world to live Buddhist lives. Sakyadhita is also a courageous idea because it invites scholars to participate in its project. It is not an academic forum, but it *is* a forum in which academics interact with practitioners in a space of rigorous inquiry, sharing ideas, and developing possibilities together. As feminist Buddhist scholars, it is our honor to be here. Our experiences with Sakyadhita are inspirational, challenging, and have changed how we view our work.

We have, however, been debating a question that we would like to explore dialogically at the 2017 conference. Over the years, we have both wondered if the bridge between scholars and practitioners is really being crossed at Sakyadhita. It can be a difficult divide and the bridge that spans it seems flimsy at times. For one thing, the content of academic discourse can be quite different from that of dharma discourse. We believe scholarship to be a political act because it takes established ideas and questions them, no matter where the answers might lead. For us, scholarship is not about hiding in an ivory tower. We believe what we do matters. We believe it is a contributing force in the development of our collective life.

When we wrestle with ideas, it is not to be disrespectful. Sometimes, however, the ideas being tackled may be important to the self-understanding of some Buddhists. As scholars, we hold that our moments of critical inquiry, though fuelled by altruistic intentions, cannot and should not shy away from difficult questions. Misunderstandings may arise. Furthermore, scholarship can be competitive and aggressive. We ourselves have had to learn to be aggressive in order to be heard in a space of male privilege and cutthroat professionalism. The tone and tenor of our

discourse can be different than that of practitioners as a result.

In this session, we would like to open a discussion with the Sakyadhita community about the role scholarship might play in this venue. What does the Sakyadhita community want from its scholars? Where does the distinctive discourse of academia fit into the larger conversation that is Sakyadhita?

## **Bhikkhuni Ordination and Digital Activism**

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*Anna Halafoff and Emma Tomalin*

Gender discrepancies, supported by religious traditions, continue to have negative effects on women's wellbeing. Such gender disparities persist in Buddhist societies and institutions, linked to cultural and religious beliefs and practices, which allocate a lower status to women by stating that female rebirth is a result of bad *karma* due to negative acts committed in previous lives. In some Buddhist traditions, in Asian as well as Western settings, nuns cannot ordain to the same level as monks, most Buddhist archetypes of enlightenment remain male, and men hold positions of power and privilege within the majority of Buddhist organisations. Since the 1980s a global Buddhist women's network, Sakyadhita, has campaigned for gender equity and full ordination for women as *bhikkhunis*.

This paper will focus on recent controversy surrounding British born Theravada monk, Ajahn Brahmavamsa Mahathera's, the abbot of Bodhinyana Monastery in Western Australia (WA), advocacy for equal rights for women within Buddhism. In 2009 Ajahn Brahm, as he is known, helped ordain four Bhikkhunis in WA, as a result of which Bodhinyana Monastery was excommunicated. In 2014, Ajahn Brahm's planned speech on Gender Equality at the United Nations Day of Vesak (UNDV) convention in Vietnam was withdrawn by the UNDV's International Committee. Both events generated significant online activity in Bhante Sujato's Blog, on the Bodhinyana Monastery website and in an online petition to invite Ajahn Brahm to deliver his paper on Gender Equity at the 2015 UNDV convention. This paper argues that Buddhist women and men, nuns, monks and lay people including scholars, are uniting globally to campaign for gender equality in Buddhism, drawing on both traditional Buddhist social theory and modern digital activism to further their aims.

## ***Candrottārā, Beyond the Moon: How Translation Moves Words into Contemplative Practice***

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*Annie Bien*

The Mahāyāna *sūtra* titled *The Prophecy of the Daughter Candrottārā* tells the story of the merchant Vimālakīrti's daughter, Candrottārā, a young woman striving on the path to enlightenment. Instead of crying when she takes birth, she sings verses about the nature of birth. Pure in body and deed, beautiful to behold and without desires, she is drawn to the Buddha's voice. The men of the city of Vaiśhali want to marry her, threaten Vimalakīrti, and terrify him. She remains unafraid, calming her father through her understanding of karma. She comforts both parents by agreeing to choose a husband, but asks to meet the Buddha first. On her way, the Buddha's disciples appear, questioning her. Candrottārā debates with them that sexual identity ultimately has no relevance for attaining enlightenment. The Buddha, listens and is delighted. He prophesies her future enlightenment. Elated, she transforms into a young man to continue her enlightened activities in the world.

What are the implications about this transformation for us today? Is this a misogynistic stance against women? Is it an inability to accept those who have sexual transformations as part of our society? Could it be a mirror into seeing just how willing we are to open any aspect of our minds? How does the mind of enlightenment cross the gender boundary even if, by definition of being human, our physical bodies must have a gender?

This paper will examine how Candrottārā reveals that warmhearted, intelligent, and respectful behavior towards others benefits everyone. It is a classic yet modern story still applicable now. When we get caught in our secondary level storylines, Candrottārā shows us how to bring kindness into our hearts and daily lives.

## **Buddhist Tantric Theology? The Genealogy and Soteriology of Tārā**

*Bee Scherer*

The-*a*-logy can be seen as a feminist religious subversion of (hetero-) patriarchal

theology. Theology stresses nurturing, motherhood and wisdom; the body and the embodied spiritual journey in aid of liberating women (and men) from patriarchal silencing, power, and oppression. Theological narratives have employed empowering female divine archetypes such as Ishtar, Isis, Gaia, Demeter, Diana, Sophia, and the Virgin Mary. I argue that Tārā can provide (and is indeed already providing) such an empowering frame in contemporary global Buddhist traditions.

In this presentation, I gauge the possibilities of developing “Theology” in the Buddhist context by discussing the genealogy, narratives, iconography, and soteriological conceptualisation of Tārā (Chin: Duōluó, Tib: *sgrol ma*), the “Saviouress.” In her form, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions provide a unique pathway to enlightened female compassion. Tārā first appears as a supporting figure to Avalokiteśvara (Guānyīn or Guānshìyīn), the embodiment of enlightened compassion who remains completely male gendered in South Asia and the Himalayas. I demonstrate that Tārā fulfils many functions within evolving and changing contexts. Such frameworks include her origin in hybridity with the Hindu goddess (Devī/Durgā) traditions; her conceptualisation as Avalokiteśvara’s compassion; as saviouress from the “eight great dangers”; as transcending the limitation of twofold gender in the form of Princess Ye shes zla ba; her rise in Tantra; in her connection and identification with the *Perfection of Wisdom* (Prajñāpāramitā); and as consort in the Mahāyoga and Yoginī Tantra traditions. After shedding light on the meaning and the function of Tārā deity yoga in Indo-Tibetan traditions. After shedding light on the meaning and the function of Tārā deity yoga in Indo-Tibetan traditions, I reflect on the challenges and opportunities Tārā provides for liberating female/feminist enlightened thought: Buddhist Tantric Theology.

### **Buddhist Feminism and Crosscultural Cognitive Dissonance**

*Brianna Kathryn Morseth*

In an increasingly globalized Buddhist paradigm, cross-cultural interaction between nuns and laywomen of diverse backgrounds is growing, opening avenues for critical and constructive conversations around the role of contemporary women in contemplative traditions. Yet how such interactions influence the psychology of Buddhist women has yet to be examined. Moreover, how psychology has historically informed contemporary conditions of Buddhist women is another neglected area of inquiry. For instance, while the status of Buddhist nuns has long been contested, the reasons for the Buddha's initial hesitance around women's ordination may have less to do with women in and of themselves and more to do with cultural norms and the

psychological state of society at the time.

To reconcile the generally inequitable status of women at the time of the Buddha and thereafter with the strength and determination of Buddhist laywomen and nuns proved to be a difficult psychological feat for much of society. Psychologists have called the state that results from such efforts "cognitive dissonance," the sense of unease around seemingly contradictory viewpoints, a state that informs much of Buddhist history up until the present. By considering the different cultural and psychological contexts for gender inequities, contemporary Buddhist women and their allies can engage in more fruitful dialogue around Buddhist feminism, benefiting immensely from cultural exchange and social action oriented approaches suitable to contemporary social contexts. Their continued dialogue in an evolving feminist context may very well entail abandoning certain practices or observations in favor of more equal and gender inclusive approaches. In fact, the ability of Buddhism to flexibly yield to adaptation while nonetheless preserving its ancient traditions is what has kept the nuns' lineage (whether full ordination or partial) alive despite the turmoil and criticism it has endured for various reasons related to the underlying individual and collective psychology of people across history.

Ultimately, while traversing diverse cultural contexts, the lineage of Buddhist nuns has far from withered, but has instead been strengthened through cross-cultural exchange and context-appropriate reformation, with many women maintaining the very determination that the first Buddhist nuns embodied. This paper will address the evolution and revolution of discourse regarding women in Buddhism through the lens of social psychology. The present analysis explores the adaptive strength of Buddhist women across cultural contexts from a psychological perspective, drawing from empirical research in cultural and gender psychology and shedding light on the social psychology of social action among Buddhism women.

### **Writing about the Self: Female Non-Buddhists' Accounts of their Vipassana Meditation Retreat Experiences**

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*Brooke Schedneck*

Female non-Buddhists have been writing detailed descriptions of their personal experiences in *vipassana* meditation retreats since the 1960s. These memoirists relate to the world their experience of the retreat process and self-transformations. Early memoirists traveled Asia in order to learn and practice *vipassana* meditation. These

memoirs are as much about the meditation practice itself as living in an Asian culture.

In this presentation, I consider two female memoirists: Marie Byles (1900-1979) and Jane Hamilton-Merritt (1937-present). Marie Byles' *Journey into Burmese Silence*, chronicles her time in a number of Burmese meditation centers in the early 1960s. Jane Hamilton-Merritt's *A Meditator's Diary: A Western Woman's Unique Experiences in Thailand Monasteries*, published in 1976, is the first memoir to discuss a lay foreigner's experience of learning meditation in Thailand. In the book she discusses in detail her meditation experiences and her challenges in finding instructions and opportunities to practice in the mid-1970s.

Paying close attention to how these women narrate their retreat experience, this presentation will interrogate such questions as: How have female non-Buddhists accessed the *vipassana* meditation retreat? What were their challenges and difficulties? Despite these female meditators' mostly positive results of the retreat and many benefits they describe, they experience challenges related to their female gender. In this presentation, I am most concerned with Marie Byles and Jane Hamilton-Merritt's reactions to these challenges. I argue that female non-Buddhist accounts of their meditation experiences reveal two possible responses: shock and dismay or acceptance and understanding. Regardless of these opposing views, both authors agree that meditation and the Buddhist teachings carry universal ideas that can be appreciated despite any challenges they face as female non-Buddhist foreign meditators in Asia.

### **The Lives of the Twenty-four *Jo mos* of the Tibetan Tradition: Identity and Religious Status**

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*Carla Gianotti*

As a tibetologist and a Buddhist practitioner, I deal with those peculiar feminine figures – earthly, divine, or archetypal – of the Buddhist Indo-Tibetan tradition that are recognized, according to a vision of equilibrium of genres and of a conciliation of genres, as a source of inspiration in the spiritual Buddhist path of contemporary women (and men). In my work, I came across an interesting Tibetan text that contains the hagiographies of twenty-four Tibetan ascetic women of the twelfth century. All except one of these twenty-four *jo mos* (venerable women or nuns), who were disciples of the great Pha Dam pa Sangs rgyas (died in 1117) are all supposed to have reached final enlightenment. Their life-stories are particularly inspiring and should be regarded, as reported in the Tibetan text, as a “message for future generations.”

In researching the identities of women ascetics and Dharma teachers in Tibetan Buddhism during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, we meet with two main difficulties: the undervaluation of their roles and the uncertainty of their designations. The undervaluation or understatement of the roles of women Dharma teachers in the Buddhism of Tibet (“Land of Snow”) applies both their numbers and to their religious status. An emblematic case is the identification in one person of two authoritative master *yoginīs* who lived more and less during the same chronological period but belong to two different schools, i.e., Ma gcig Lab sgron (1055-1154 or 1055-1149) and Ma gcig Zha ma (1062-1149).

The second problem, the uncertain designations of women Dharma teachers during this period, is the difficulty of translating the religious or spiritual terminology used to identify them, such as *ma jo*, *jo mo*, *btsun ma*, *nya ma*, *ma jo smyon ma*, and other terms. In the English translation of the *Blue Annals*, for example, the Tibetan names of *ma jo*, *jo mo* and *btsun ma* are often translated using the generic term “nun.” In Tibetan Buddhism, women teachers of Dharma seem to present religious identities that are much more fluid, unsettled, and less codified than those of their counterparts who are male Dharma masters. What is more relevant is the absence of terminology to verify the spiritual progress or religious status of women adepts on the path. An analogous situation is the problematic categorization of ascetic women in Hinduism and Indian Buddhism, for example, the terms *pravrajitā* and *parivrājikā*. This paper will explore these issues.

## **Women in the Tibetan Buddhist Traditions of Manang**

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*Chandra Kala Ghimire*

Manang is a district of the Gandaki Zone, Western Development Region of Nepal. As a remote, trans-Himalayan and a district adjoining Tibet, it has longstanding trade and cultural relations with Tibet. Buddhism entered Manang from Tibet in various ways. In the history of Manang, three highly influential Buddhist personalities stand out: a nun named Jomo Pema, Lama Khedu Karma Lopsang, and the saint Milarepa are .

Women, as nuns and as laywomen, help preserve Buddhism’s tangible and intangible cultural heritages, including the *gonpas*, festivals, and rituals. The socio-religious life of laywomen formally begins from the age of sixteen, as members of *phée*, which are traditional youth groups, and after marriage, as members of *āngumi*, or traditional



mother's groups. Each of these groups has defined roles and responsibilities as prescribed by the *mithewa*, the traditional administrative committee of the village.

Because of the dominance of the Karma Kagyu sub-school in the region, religious practices focus on two aspects: first, health, prosperity and happiness in worldly life, and second, final release from the wheel of suffering by the accumulation of merits and wisdom. For this, women participate in *nyunge* fasting practices, *mani* recitations, Vajraguru (Padmasambhava) *mantra* recitations, *mani-kulpa*, and some indigenous festivals that show Buddhist influences, such as Yar-tong, Mitha, and Losar. Women in Nyeshang, a valley in Manang, hold a special Buddhist festival called Angumi-ney that is observed only by women. Such traditional practices are inherited by the younger generation from the older generations. In Kathmandu, Nyeshang Manang Women Society, a female organization has been formed by migrant women to work in education, health and socio-religious issues. This paper will explore women's roles in Manang Buddhist culture.

### **Demonstrating the Existence of Fully Ordained Nuns in Tibet**

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*Darcie Price-Wallace*

This paper will address the widespread narrative that fully ordained Tibetan nuns (*dge slong ma*, hereafter *gelongmas*) never existed within Tibet. While the scholarship of Dan Martin, Hildegard Diemberger, and more recently, statements from the 17<sup>th</sup> Karmapa, Ogyen Thinley Dorje, also challenge this notion, this paper will focus explicitly on the work of the Tibetan monk and scholar Serche Lharam. In his text, *A New Explanation of the Hundred Controversial Issues Regarding the Fully Ordained Nuns: All Wish-fulfilling Treasure, the Beryl Collection*, he identifies nine different Tibetan sources that also dispel the notion that fully ordained nuns never existed in Tibet. By examining these sources and bringing to light new information regarding untold and unrecognized histories of these texts and figures, this essay will clarify the various accounts of ordination of *gelongmas*. It will illuminate the discourse regarding the figures who performed the ordination and help clarify who was ordained. In doing so, the paper will demonstrate that there were, in fact, fully ordained nuns living and practicing in Tibet. By challenging the grand narrative that nuns did not exist in Tibet, this paper has three aims: 1) to identify the various methods for ordaining *gelongmas*, 2) to get a broader understanding of monastic communities of *gelongmas*, and 3) to establish a basis for questioning how the often cited idea that *gelongmas* did not exist in Tibet no longer has precedent.



## Ordinary Women: Laywomen in Two Tang-Dynasty Buddhist Encyclopedias

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Elizabeth Kenney

Two important medieval Chinese Buddhist encyclopedias – *Jinglu Yixiang* (*Various Aspects of Sutras and Vinaya*), compiled by Baochang in 516, and *Fayuan Zhulin* (*Pearl Forest in the Dharma Garden*), edited by Daoshi in 668 – include entries on laywomen. Both encyclopedias are massive compendia of scriptural material covering an astonishing range of topics. Baochang's *Sutras and Vinaya* consists mostly of quotations from *sutras*. *Pearl Forest* is also largely excerpts from *sutras* but with added introductions and discussion by Daoshi.

Baochang was also the author of an important collection of biographies of Chinese nuns, *Biqiuni zhuan*. In the section about laywomen in his *Sutras and Vinaya*, Baochang gives us no stories of actual women. Rather, he presents seventeen stories about laywomen found in Indian scriptures. Most of the stories are didactic; for example, a poor woman who offered her long hair to the Buddha is rewarded with rebirth as a god. Some of the stories are peculiar and rather amusing. Baochang's discussion is less about women *per se* than about *karma* and extraordinary happenings.

Daoshi's *Pearl Forest* entry on laywomen has two parts. In Part One, an introduction, Daoshi describes laywomen in the familiar misogynistic terms, e.g., that women are like poisonous snakes, etc. Daoshi writes, in language not found elsewhere in the Buddhist canon, that if a family is poor, it is due to a woman; if there is disharmony in the household, if brothers are separated, and so forth, it is all a woman's fault. Part Two of the *Pearl Forest* entry on laywomen is titled "Immoral and False [Laywomen]" Here, Daoshi quotes several *sutras* and the *Dazhidulun*, painting a largely negative portrait of laywomen.

Both encyclopedias are clearly organized. For more than a millennium after their composition, Chinese and Japanese scholars continued to consult these user-friendly tomes for information on specific topics. We can imagine that literate laywomen also read these encyclopedias in order to investigate the canonical Buddhist view of laywomen. Both encyclopedias have entries for laymen, too. *Sutras and Vinaya* has entries on queens, princesses, and *upāsikās*. These other entries enhance our appreciation for the noticeably different portraits of ordinary women that are painted by Baochang and Daoshi.

## Educating Theravāda Laity about *Bhikkhunīs*: Diverse and Innovative Methods

*Ellen Posman*

Based on ethnographic observations and interviews in Sri Lanka and Thailand during the 2015-2016 academic year, this paper focuses on the methods used by specific Theravada *bhikkhunīs* to introduce themselves to the public and educate the laity about *bhikkhunīs*. In particular, this paper looks at the ideas and actions of four *bhikkhunīs*: Bhikkhunīs Vijithananda and Dhammacari in Sri Lanka, and Bhikkhunīs Dhammananda and Nandayani in Thailand. Each of these four women is the chief nun at a temple, and each has particular ideas and methods for raising awareness about Theravada *bhikkhunīs*. In Sri Lanka, *bhikkhunīs* are often still confused with *dasa sil mātās*, and in Thailand, *bhikkhunīs* are sometimes confused not only with *mae chii*, but even with *bhikkhus*, because *bhikkhunīs* are so rare. Despite the years of the order's existence, in both countries there are many laypeople who are still not fully aware of the situation, status, or roles of the *bhikkhunīs*, and in neither country are they formally recognized by the government or the monastic hierarchy.

The methods advocated by these four nuns to raise awareness are an intricate mix of tradition and innovation. Of the four nuns highlighted, Bhikkhuni Nandayani most exemplifies a traditional approach. The *sāmanerīs*, *sikkhamānās*, and *bhikkhunīs* whom she oversees at two sister temples near Chiang Mai follow a very strict interpretation of the *vinaya*. She tends to not talk to the public about the *bhikkhunī* issue, but rather try to lead by example. The other three *bhikkhunīs* discussed are more explicit in their methods of raising awareness. They also utilize traditional *vinaya* and rituals, including *pindapatha* (almsgiving), the *vassa* (rains retreat), and the *kathina* ceremony (ceremony to end the rain retreat). Within these, however, are some innovations; for example, Bhikkhuni Vijithananda includes an explanation about *bhikkhunīs* in her addresses to the public during the *kathina* ceremony and at other such ritual occasions. Bhikkhuni Vijithananda and the nuns at the Sakyadhita Center in Sri Lanka also emphasize social service. This demonstrates their worth to the community and brings people to the temple, which introduces them and their situation to the public. Bhikkhuni Dhammacari and Bhikkhuni Dhammananda emphasize education, specifically education about the history of and legal arguments for the existence of a Theravada *bhikkhuni* order. Bhikkhuni Dhammacari, originally from Singapore but practicing in Sri Lanka, insists that training on this issue is important so that Sri Lankan nuns

themselves can explain the order to the laity, rather than relying on foreign scholars. And of the four, Bhikkhuni Dhammananda is the most innovative, not only writing about the history and legality of the Theravada *bhikkhuni* order, but utilizing TV media to publicize such debates, and modifying the traditional temporary ordination tradition in Thailand to incorporate a discussion of these issues with women who return to the laity after nine days as ambassadors to the public.

### **Chinese Women Practicing Transnational Meditation in Contemporary China**

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*Elsa Ngar-sze Lau*

Based on ethnographic study in mainland China since 2014, this paper explores how the recent popularity of transnational meditation practices may be changing the paradigm of involvement in meditation practice by women. Until now, only monks or laymen could practice Chan in Mahāyāna monasteries in mainland China. However, in contemporary Chinese societies an increasing number of Chinese nuns and laywomen are practicing transnational forms of meditation, such as *samatha* and *vipassanā* in the Theravāda tradition, and popular transnational Buddhist meditation practices such as mindfulness. Some nuns and laywomen have even become teachers and pioneers promoting meditation in the Theravāda tradition and mindfulness practice. This phenomenon may have an impact on traditional Mahayāna Chan monasteries that allow nuns and laywomen to practice in a “public hall.” For example, a few Chan halls in nunneries have been newly built. Utilizing cases studies, this paper will examine the tension and dilemma of gender issues in the transnational meditation movement in mainland China.

### **The Lives of Buddhist Nuns in the Tawang Region of Arunachal Pradesh, Northeastern India**

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*Genden Lhamu*

This paper is based on research that I recently completed as part of my M.Phil in the Department of Buddhist Studies at the University of Delhi. My dissertation is the result of two months of intensive research conducted in February and March of 2016. During this time, I investigated the daily lives of Buddhist nuns living in Arunachal Pradesh, a remote area located in northern India. Scholars consider this area a paradise for the study of its indigenous histories and cultures. It is located in the northeastern part of

India, to the north of Assam, east of Bhutan and south of Tibet. Once part of the southern frontier of Tibet, it has been part of India since 1914.

I undertook this research project because, as a Buddhist nun born and raised in Tawang, I felt it was important to document the virtually unknown history of nunneries, called *ani gompas*, in this area. While there are several published works on Buddhist nuns of Himalayan regions such as Ladakh, Sikkim, Nepal, Himachal, Bhutan, and so on, to date, there is no clear documentation on nuns and nunneries in the Tawang region.

During my research, I documented that there are approximately two hundred nuns living in several communities, all belonging to the Gelugpa school. Most of the nuns are under the age of 20, with only few over the age of 75. I visited the three main nunneries (Brama Dung-Chung, Gyangong, and my own community of Singsur), plus a hermitage, and collected data through extensive interviews with more than five nuns from each nunnery. The nuns expressed themselves freely, explaining their decision to become a nun, their education and teachers, the milestones in their lives, their disappointments, achievements, daily routines, and acts of devotion and service, as well as the current structures in their monasteries for educating young nuns. When possible, I also looked into their contacts with local monks' monasteries. I documented the nuns and their monasteries through photographs, which I will include in my presentation.

These nuns' stories are important for constructing an understanding of Buddhist nuns in the Himalayas as well as for understanding the cultural traditions and history of their monasteries (*gompas*), which few people outside of the region know about.

### **A Forgotten Nun-Doctor of Hong Kong: Bhiksuni Foying**

*Hin Tak Sik*

During the 1950s and 1960s, an eminent Buddhist nun by the name of Foying (1908–1970) lived in Hong Kong. She was a medical doctor and was well-known as “Master Doctor.” She was also famous for giving Dharma lectures and talks, writing commentaries on Buddhist texts, strictly following the monastic rules, practising diligently, being kind to others, and treating the sick out of compassion. Now, more than forty years after her death, she is largely forgotten by Buddhists in Hong Kong and is completely unknown to the younger generation. This paper aims to introduce Bhiksuni Foying to the present generation, so that people can know more about this

remarkable Buddhist nun.

To learn more about Bhiksuni Foying, I collected information from her commemorative album (composed by her disciples and published by a nunnery in Taiwan), the prefaces of her published works (written by her monastic friends), and Hong Kong newspaper reports. In addition, I visited the small village house where she lived in Hong Kong and interviewed two nuns who were living there. I also talked to an elderly nun who was her neighbour when she was young. In this way, I discovered important details about various aspects of her life, including her family, medical education and practice, becoming a Buddhist, renouncing lay life, living as a monastic in China, and fleeing from China to Hong Kong during the civil war in China. I learned about her daily Dharma practice, including morning and evening chanting, refraining from taking meals after noon, reciting discourses, studying Buddhist texts and treatises, sitting meditation, and giving Dharma lectures in Hong Kong and other places, such as Taiwan and Honolulu. I also learned about her publications and that she provided medical care to the sick.

In brief, Bhiksuni Foying was a meritorious nun in Hong Kong's recent past. She modeled the deeds of a *bodhisattva* in her devotion to Buddhism, diligent practice, and compassionate care of the sick – virtues that should be emulated by Buddhist monastics and laity alike. Her teachings on the disciplinary training for Buddhist nuns, especially her commentary on the rules for nuns (*Bhiksuni-prātimoka*) of the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* tradition, is still influential and significant. Her Dharma teachings were extraordinary in applying modern medical and scientific knowledge to interpret Buddhist doctrines. Hence, this eminent Buddhist, with her abundant merits, should be remembered and praised.

### **Learning Monastic Discipline and the Communal life of Myanmar *Thilashin***

*Hiroko Kawanami*

There are approximately 60,000 Buddhist nuns called *thilashin* in Myanmar today. Although they are not fully ordained, *thilashin* adhere to monastic rules and norms passed down in their tradition to maintain moral discipline and longevity of their community. These monastic rules embody their moral ideals and regulate their religious life; observing them is an integrated part of their daily routine and is essential for fostering self-discipline and a correct attitude toward other members in the

community. However, to date, there are few studies that focus on the detailed legal aspect of their communal life.

This study focuses on the social realities of large nunnery schools in Myanmar where young students spend many years, sometimes decades, living together to achieve their academic goals. It discusses the role of socialization and daily training as they work, study, and practice in a communal environment. Each nunnery has different priorities, according to the type of work it does, which may determine the level of discipline imposed upon its members. In large monastic institutions, communal regulations are essential and those in position of authority (teachers and senior nuns) exert considerable influence to maintain order. They are also responsible for anti-social behaviour or problems that may occur.

Today, some monastic rules are at odds with modernity, either incompatible with the needs of contemporary nunneries or with the current lifestyle of monastic members. There are also new challenges that the traditional monastic rules do not address (for example, the use of smart phones and social media). This paper seeks to understand how nunnery schools provide a legal framework to sustain their way of life in modern times and examine other practices that help inform communal cohesion, a cohesion that may also inform ritual practices and religious activities in relation to monks and engagement with the outside world.

## **A Contemporary Emanation of Green Tārā in Tibet**

*Holly Gayley*

Compassion is expressed through numerous miracles in the life story of Khandro Tāre Lhamo (1938–2002), considered by those in her homeland to be an emanation of Green Tārā. A female tantric master practicing in the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Tāre Lhamo played a significant role in revitalizing Buddhist teachings and institutions in the region of Golok during the 1980s and 1990s, alongside her husband, Namtrul Rinpoche (1944–2011). The most recent biography of her, written by Khenpo Rigdzin Dargye, a cleric-scholar from her homeland of Padma County, includes vivid accounts of her visionary journeys to the lower realms to save the recently deceased from the

torments of hell. What was the nature of Tāre Lhamo's journeys? How are they different from the stories of revenants (*'das log*) who face death in order to traverse the six realms of existence and return to tell about it? This paper discusses the importance of local conceptions of the *bodhisattva* Tārā, her enduring presence for Tibetans in the form of female emanations, and her compassionate intervention in the lives and deaths of local community members.

## **The Next Obstacles for Buddhist-Feminist Scholar-Practitioners: Rita Gross' Self-Identities and Legacies**

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*Hsiao-Lan Hu*

On November 11, 2015, the world-renowned Buddhist-feminist scholar-practitioner Rita Gross (1943-2015) passed away, three weeks after suffering a massive stroke. For me, her passing was preceded and succeeded by two events that marked the identities she cared the most about. She always insisted that I introduce her as a "Buddhist-feminist scholar-practitioner." Three days before her stroke, she was teaching at my retreat center in Michigan as a respected feminist practitioner. Nine days after her passing, she was honored at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meetings as a Buddhist scholar.

At the 13<sup>th</sup> Sakyadhita Conference in Vaishali, India, Rita gave a talk that was later published in *Tricycle* magazine as "The Man-Made Obstacle." Surely, as a woman in her generation, Rita experienced many obstacles. In particular, she experienced many obstacles in introducing critical scholarly work to Buddhist practitioners and bringing views of Buddhist practice to religious studies. Rita was well published and very eloquent about what she found questionable, as a scholar and a practitioner, and as a feminist and a Buddhist. This paper does not at all intend to review her work or rehash her arguments. Instead, because a few well-established scholars and Rita's long-term friends told me at her memorial ceremony at the AAR that it had meant a lot to Rita to have me as her one-and-only graduate student ever, I will discuss how my generation of Buddhist-feminist scholar-practitioners can, in her spirit, carry on her legacies and tackle the next obstacles.

## **Jajae Hospice and Bhikkhuni Nunghaeng**

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*HyeYeon Sunim*



This paper discusses the life and achievements of Bhikkhuni Nunghaeng, a Buddhist nun who built the first Buddhist hospice in Korea. The word “hospice” means a specialized facility that houses patients who are close to death and provides them with minimal medical treatments to reduce severe pain, without artificial life-sustaining equipment. It also gives psychological and religious support for patients to enjoy the rest of their lives and be peaceful in their last moments.

The purpose of a hospice is closely related to the Buddha’s teachings and to Mahāyāna Buddhism, which emphasizes searching for wisdom and liberating living beings from suffering. Nevertheless, modern Korean Buddhism has been negligent in its public service to surrounding communities, placing stress instead on accomplishing individual perfection through religious practice. Because *bhikkhunis* practice in humble surroundings and are subject to far fewer social influences than *bhikkhus*, it is extremely significant that a Buddhist nun, acting only from her own pure aspiration, was able to establish Jajae Hospice Hospital to realize the Buddha’s teachings.

In the beginning of her life as a nun, Bhikkhuni Nunghaeng was a Zen meditation practitioner who frequented meditation temples. One day, she came to a hospice hospital run by a Catholic organization and volunteered to do social service. There, she met a *bhikkhu* who was dying and heard his last wish: that there be a Buddhist hospice hospital where Buddhist monks and nuns could spend the last moments of their lives peacefully, listening to Buddhist chanting. That was the beginning. Afterwards, she made a major vow and started raising funds to build a hospice and a temple. Finally, in 2011, the first Buddhist hospice hospital in Korea was established. Up to now, Bhikkhuni Nunghaeng has continued to embody the *bodhisattva* ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Today, she runs Mahabodhi, a meditational psychology graduate school to train skilled staff, as well as a hospice hospital.

## **Religious Dietary Laws, Buddhist Ethics, and Food Business: Running a Traditional Temple Food Restaurant in Korea**

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*Hyun-Jin Kim*

My story begins with how I was born a woman and a Buddhist, and why I ended up studying Buddhist ethics and running a business of temple food restaurant. A brief answer to the first question is that it was not my choice; my mom was a Buddhist and I

happened to be born a woman. The first question leads to the second. I wanted to know “why” and that is why I decided to pay attention to the religious codes regarding food, both academically and in business as well.

In general, Korean Buddhist dietary culture can be understood within the context of East Asian monastic food culture. Therefore, before I can tackle Korean temple food, I will briefly survey the history and development of the regulations on the five pungent vegetables and explain the combined influences of India and China in forming a unique dietary culture in the East Asian Chan tradition. For that purpose, I will first examine cultural shifts, from going for alms in India to cultivating vegetables for food in monastic life, reflected in the elaborate regulations that developed in early Chan Buddhist groups. Second, I will explain the unique characteristics of Chan practice among those groups that preserved the strict vegetarian tradition in China.

As a mark of the superiority of their practice, many legendary records of respected monks mention that they very strictly observed dietary laws as part of their practice of austerities (*dhuta*). As in many other religious traditions, food codes help create a unique identity for certain groups of people. The strict dietary law regarding five pungent vegetables that has been preserved in East Asian Buddhism has become a symbol of identity that is still practiced today.

In this paper, I will focus on the uniqueness of Korean Buddhist food in the past and present. During the Chosun Dynasty, under severe persecution by the Confucian government, Buddhist communities tried to survive independently by cultivating local farms and depending on the support from groups of Buddhist women, especially retired royal concubines and maidservants at court. This explains the three syncretic characteristics of Korean temple food: (1) food without the five pungent vegetables as a Buddhist practice; (2) humble, local food for a self-sufficient community; and (3) food of noble families prepared by retired women. Evidence of women’s contributions to Buddhist temple food are still evident in the rituals and foods offered during the Celebration of Buddha’s Sermon on Vulture Peak Mountain, among others.

Finally, I will discuss temple food in Korea from the perspective of culture and business. Korean temple food maintains religious food codes and, at the same time, is syncretic in its openness to other food cultures. Today, due to business pressures, only a few Korean Buddhists are trying to maintain and develop their traditional food culture. They are also challenged by the misconception, both inside and outside the

Buddhist community, that Buddhist temple food is any food cooked by Buddhist nuns. The future of Korean temple food rests in the middle of these challenges.

## **Buddhism Engagement with the Deaf Community in Contemporary Taiwan Society: Two Case Studies**

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*Janet Mei Hing Tam*

While *bodhisattvas* have the intention to save all beings, one has to ask the questions: “Does everyone in society have access to the Dharma?” Who has been excluded or is not yet included?” It is not difficult to see that there are still many communities that have barriers to overcome in learning about Buddhism. The community of persons with disabilities (PWDs) is an example. Even though this is the largest minority in society and even though disabilities have a long recorded history, disability studies in western academia only started to grow during the 1980s. As M. Miles has pointed out, the field grew “in parallel with a growing interest in the study of world religions, inter-faith activities and cross-cultural comparisons, yet there is little published material about disabilities in Asian religions.” Although Buddhism is not entirely out of reach for PWDs, there are still various barriers for PWDs to overcome in daily life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), these barriers include inadequate policies and standards, negative attitudes, lack of services, problems with service delivery, inadequate funding, lack of accessibility, lack of consultation and involvement, and lack of data and evidence.

For many PWDs, the above barriers curtail their everyday experience, including attending religious activities. As a Buddhist and an advocate of equal rights and opportunities in many aspects of society, I have always been interested to find out about PWDs’ involvement in Buddhism. This very broad and infrequently explored topic can be addressed from different perspectives, such as textual analysis, doctrinal studies, Buddhist ethics, and qualitative surveys on the value of Buddhism for PWDs. In this paper, I shall focus on Buddhism engagement in the deaf community in contemporary society in Taiwan. Through two case studies, I hope to shed light on the challenges to participation and potential solutions.

## **Korean Bhikkhunis’ Vinaya Education and the Role of the Diamond Vinaya Center**

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*Jeokyeon Sunim*

The Buddha established rules to uphold the moral authority of the Buddhist order. He passed away, he asked his disciples to take his teachings and the precepts as their teacher. Korean Buddhism has not been so successful in establishing a system of *vinaya* education, which is fundamental to forming a pure Buddhist *sangha* community. However, aware that *vinaya* education is a necessity, throughout Korean Buddhist history the Korean *bhikkhuni sangha* has endeavored to maintain the status of *bhikkhunis*, to create a unified ordination procedure, and to restore the system of dual *sangha*.

In this paper, I would like to discuss the establishment of Bongryungsa Diamond Vinaya Center and its curriculum, to shed light on the practice of Korean Buddhist nuns who tried to live up to the basic spirit of the *vinaya*. First, I will explain the process of restoring the *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony according to the dual-*sangha* system as it relates to the status of the Korean *bhikkhuni sangha* and to the endeavors of the late great *bhikkhu vinaya* teacher Jawoon, who played a leading role. Second, I will reconsider the role of the late *bhikkhuni vinaya* teacher Myoeom, whose ideas about *vinaya* followed Jawoon's. Myoeom Sunim established the Diamond Vinaya Center, which provided the first *vinaya* education system for *bhikkhuni* and helped restore the spirit of *vinaya*. In particular, I will focus on the dual-*sangha* system that is the basic paradigm for discussing the status of the *bhikkhuni sangha*.

In addition, I will discuss the role of the Diamond Vinaya Center, an education center for *bhikkhunis* that specializes in *vinaya* and runs an open, nationwide training program for the study and practice of *vinaya*. The Diamond Vinaya Center organizes lectures, training, and education for novice nuns, probationers, and *bhikkhunis*. This training program has special meaning, because it nurtures *bhikkhunis* who are qualified to transmit the *vinaya* to the next generation of *bhikkhunis*.

## **A Frugal and Generous Life: Bhiksuni Chi Cheung's Commitment to Education for Children**

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*Kam Kong Lam*

Bhiksuni Chi Cheung (1911–1999) was a nun from a wealthy family in Guangzhou. She took up residence in Tai Kwong Yuen Nunnery after she received ordination in her twenties and henceforth had no contact to her family. The nunnery was situated in a village named Shek Ku Lung near Tai Po in the New Territories. It was remote – even far away from the railway station, which was the only way to travel out of Tai Po. She studied Buddhism diligently and was granted the title “Little Master of the *Surangama Sutra*” by her master.

In 1945, after the end of the Second World War, it was common for children to be malnourished and to lack opportunities for education, even primary education. Conditions were worse in remote areas such as Tai Po. Deeply moved by compassion, Bhiksuni Chi Cheung took action to help the children in the villages. She provided them with early morning classes and lunch before they left school. From then on, she became wholeheartedly committed to establishing educational opportunities for children at the grassroots level. This became her life’s work as a nun.

Unexperienced in educational management, Bhiksuni Chi Cheung lacked resources and did not get any sponsorship at the beginning. She suffered untold hardships throughout her life in order to fulfill her goal. Due to her Buddhist faith and her compassion for poor children, through arduous effort, she eventually established a kindergarten, a private primary school, and a private middle school. She was the first nun in Hong Kong to provide education for children and the first to be directly involved in educational management. Because of her extraordinary contributions to society and her distinguished career as a devout Buddhist nun, she was granted an honorary MBE and was the first monastic in Hong Kong to receive this prestigious honour.

This article will describe the struggles Bhiksuni Chi Cheung underwent to develop and support the schools until, at last, the government began to sponsor them. I will interview some of her students, who wish to express their heartfelt thanks to her by telling the story of how an ordinary nun established a reputation as an exemplary member of the *sangha*. She passed away eighteen years ago and the schools she established were either closed or amalgamated with another school, due to declining enrollments. The students who graduated from her schools now have different roles and responsibilities in society. They all share a profound gratitude and infinite respect

for this pioneering nun.

## **Expanding Enlightened Awareness: Women in the Transmission and Indigenization of Buddhism in Brazil**

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*Karma Lekshe Tsomo*

The introduction and spread of Buddhism in North America has been the subject of considerable research and discussion in the field of religious studies, but Buddhism in South America has received far less attention. Buddhism was transmitted to Brazil in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century along with Japanese immigration and Buddhist temples developed as centers of Japanese diaspora culture. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fresh wave of Buddhist teachers introduced a variety of new Buddhist traditions, representing the Theravada, Chinese Mahayana, Zen, and Tibetan Vajrayana traditions. In recent decades, women have been active in a variety of new Buddhist temples and Dharma centers. This paper will document women's contributions and explore the reasons for women's prominence in the transmission of Buddhism to Brazil.

Each Buddhist tradition that has been introduced is unique and the process of their adoption and adaptation in Brazil is quite distinct from earlier patterns of Japanese Buddhist acculturation. Whereas the development of Japanese Buddhism in Brazil was inextricably linked with the immigrant experience, the Theravada, Chinese Mahayana, Zen, and Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist traditions that subsequently developed have been adopted by native Brazilians. Of these, the Theravada and Chinese Mahayana traditions have been transmitted from Asia, by Asian Buddhist teachers, and have developed very slowly over the years. The Zen and Tibetan Vajrayana traditions (largely Kagyu and Nyingma), by contrast, have been transmitted from the United States, by American and Tibetan refugee teachers, and have developed very quickly in recent years. This paper will focus on the variety of roles that women have played in these traditions and to explore why women have emerged as leaders in some traditions and not in others.

This paper is the result of research conducted at more than a dozen Buddhist temples, Dharma centers, and community centers in May and June 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Recife, Natal, Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Viamão, Tres Coroas, and Caxias de Sul. As a participant/observer, I researched the history, development, demographics, practice styles, and organizational styles of these temples and centers, with special attention to the roles of women. This paper documents the unique processes of

adaptation of Asian Buddhist traditions in contemporary Brazilian society and the reasons for women's prominent roles in certain temples and traditions.

## **Women's Empowerment and Sustainable Development Through STEM Education for Buddhist Nuns**

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*Kat LaFever*

Well-publicized international imperatives endorse STEM education to empower women and girls worldwide. This study focuses specifically on developing programs and initiatives for STEM teaching and learning among Vajrayana Buddhist nuns, to increase their leadership and community-building humanitarianism. This study advocates post-secondary education for Buddhist nuns in the STEM fields, as well as developing P-12 STEM educational programs by Buddhist nuns and novices in their home monasteries. It examines the Dalai Lama's position on science and secular education, as well as STEM educational opportunities that currently exist for Buddhist nuns and novices.

This research supports the initiatives of international governmental and non-governmental organizations advancing educational opportunities for women and girls. Moreover, it advocates the critical role that STEM-educated women can play in the context of sustainable development and infrastructure projects. Equitable educational opportunities for women are a human right, and supporting STEM education for women is a strategic approach for advancing gender equity and equality as well as women's empowerment. This study defines three core concepts – gender equality, gender equity, and women's empowerment – that guide many of the international imperatives supporting STEM education for women and girls worldwide. Moreover, it explores these concepts from the perspective of Buddhist feminists, namely Rita M. Gross, Grace Schireson, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo. In light of the stark realities of global warming and climate change as well as educational inequities for women and the exploitation of the environment for the benefit of relatively few, if empowered by STEM education, what agency and initiatives could Buddhist nuns and novices advance through their humanitarian work?

## **Perfection of Filial Piety in Buddhism: A Study of Lady Clara Ho's Social Actions in Hong Kong**



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*Kwong-Chuen Ching*

Lady Clara Ho's social welfare activities to benefit Buddhism and society in Hong Kong during the 1920s and 1930s in Hong Kong are well known. Her early contributions included providing Buddhist education for nuns and laywomen, and general education for the poor. Later, she established Tung Lin Kok Yuen as a permanent institution for propagating Buddhism.

The strict application of traditional academic disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology to explain religious behavior tends to reduce research findings to collective behaviours and neglect individuals' search for meaning in the religious context. Some theorists using liberal feminist methodologies have also been critiqued for neglecting to study individuals' everyday lives. This research gap may also extend to the study of Lady Clara's social welfare activities.

In this research project, I will adopt a Buddhist Studies approach to gender, based on historical texts that record the life of Lady Clara. I would like to draw on scholarly studies of the Buddha's teachings on filial piety at different stages of Buddhist development, i.e., early Buddhism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Chinese Buddhism. Within this framework, I will then examine the social welfare activities of Lady Clara during different periods of her life: prior to the 1920s, the 1920s, and the 1930s. The paper will conclude with an analysis of Lady Clara's vision and her view of women's roles and abilities to the teachings of Buddhism on filial piety. Lady Clara pointed out the importance of Buddhism for transforming the world and the important roles women play in the family, society, and country. In particular, I will investigate whether or not she regarded perfecting the Buddha's teachings on filial piety to be of equal importance for women and for men.

### **Teaching Dharma through English Songs**

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*Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap*

In Buddhist countries, parents often want their children to learn something good from Buddhism, because it is, in fact, a good way of living. Apart from fascinating illustrated stories of the Buddha, short simple songs with beautiful melodies are also a means to introduce children to the teachings of the Buddha and leave an impact on their minds.

In this workshop, we will exchange experiences about teaching Dharma to children through songs. First, participants will share their experiences of teaching Dharma to children and how songs can be used as a means to introduce the Dharma to them. Then together, we will listen to and sing some English Buddhist songs. Participants can also teach one another the songs they know. Below are some selected songs:

### **The Birth of the Buddha**

In the ancient land  
A child is born  
Once a time so long.  
And the gods and human beings,  
So they say,  
Paid homage to the Lord:  
*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma-sambuddhassa.*

### **To Love is to Care**

Be kind to all your friends and family.  
Be kind to cats and butterflies and trees.  
Don't hurt the fishes swimming in the sea.  
Here is what the Buddha says to me:  
To love is to care for all living things around us.  
To love is to be kind to all beings around us.

### **Feminism and the Everyday Lives of Nuns and Monks in Kinnaur**

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*Linda LaMacchia*

A few years ago, an educated Himalayan nun in a nunnery in India said to me, "We are not feminists," but she did not explain what she meant. Using as sources interviews recorded in 2015 with two nuns and one monk whom I have known for many years, from three different villages in central and lower Kinnaur, this paper attempts to interpret her statement in the context of monks' and nuns' day-to-day lives. In the interviews, I asked the monk to give an example of a nun who had helped him in his life and an example of a nun he had helped. I asked each of the nuns how she had helped a monk and how a monk had helped her. I argue that

their stories demonstrate a cooperative and not a competitive relationship between monks and nuns in their villages.

The paper concludes that if feminism means wanting increased opportunities and access to education for women, then the educated nuns I know are feminists, whether or not they use the term, but if feminism implies disharmony and criticism of the men in their lives, then they are not. Part 1 looks at scholarly debate about Buddhist feminism, for example, the work of Nirmala Salgado, who “questions the relevance of liberal and feminist theories in relation to narratives about Buddhist nuns.” Part 2 summarizes the interview narratives of day-to-day village life in Kinnaur and the ways in which monks and nuns interact in them. Part 3 looks for commonalities and differences between the narratives, in particular, between the monk’s examples and those of the nuns.

### **Western Women in Maroon Robes: The Evolution of a Distinct Western Female Sangha in the Tibetan Gelugpa Buddhist Tradition**

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*Lozang Tseten*

The Buddhist tradition itself will not be strengthened  
merely by the numbers of people who become ordained.  
That will depend rather on the quality of our monks and nuns.  
~ His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet

The growing numbers of western women who ordain within the Tibetan Gelugpa school of Buddhism are creating a western monastic *sangha* that is distinct from its ancient roots in Asia while maintaining the fundamental teachings of the Dharma and the *vinaya*. These nuns meet the many challenges they face with patience and a determination to succeed, driven by their motivation to live according to the Dharma as Buddhist nuns. They are required to live simply, having renounced the householders’ life, but very often have no monastery to live in. There are very few monastic communities in the west, let alone nunneries. The nuns are expected to live frugally, but many live at or below the poverty line. Having no financial support from their tradition, they are sometimes compelled to take up paid work. They are expected to behave and act in accordance with the monastic code, but receive little or no training to do so.

For an understanding of the nuns’ situation, their voices must be heard. This brief

study of nuns living in Queensland, Australia, listens to and offers a snapshot of their circumstances and the challenges they strive to meet. The underlying issues of mentorship, training, and financial support continue to be areas of concern for both current and future nuns and novices. By capturing individual aspects of their stories, the study aims to be a stepping-stone toward a more profound understanding of their lived experiences and challenges. These pioneering Buddhist women will instigate future solutions.

Betsy Napper observed, “While the Sangha has been the centre of the Buddhist community in traditional societies, its role in the west is a work in progress.” My search for literature related to western *sangha* communities turned up very little. It is my hope that this small and arguably very limited study might encourage others to continue the work, it has great potential. As Gendun Rinpoche comments, “The Sangha’s goal is to think of the distant future. The distant future isn’t now; it’s the centuries to come, the future generations. The sangha is crucial because it ensures the durability of the Dharma experience.

### ***Dakinis as Consorts in the Sacred Art of Tibet***

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*Lyudmila Klasanova*

The woman as a consort or spiritual partner in Tibetan Buddhist practice has various symbolic names, one of which is *dakini* (Tibetan: *mkha' 'gro ma*), usually translated as “sky goer” or “sky dancer.” She is also called *yogini* (Sanskrit: *yoginī*; Tibetan: *rnal 'byor ma*), “seal,” (*mudrā*; *phyag rgya*), “transcendent wisdom” (*prajñā*; *shes rab*), “awareness” (*vidyā*; *rig pa*), “goddess of awareness” (*vidyādevī*; *rigpa'i lha mo*), and “awareness holder” (*vidyādhari*; *rig 'dzin ma*). In the Tibetan tantric tradition, the consort is also called “secret mother” (*gsang yum*), a term often used for wives of senior teachers or treasure revealers (*gter ston*).

According to Tibetan Buddhism, every woman is a *dakini* and has the potential to realize the profound wisdom encoded in her nature. In the highest practice of Vajrayana, male practitioners rely on women as consorts in order to realize the bliss of awareness that reveals emptiness. The role of woman is essential for the achievement of the ultimate goal, as stated in the *Chandamaharosana tantra*: “Buddhahood is obtained from bliss, and apart from women there will not be bliss.”

From the perspective of spiritual realization in Vajrayāna, if a woman has a strong aspiration and karmic prerequisite to overcome the instinctive need for procreation, her capacity for higher awareness is greater than that of a man. But even if she does choose to be a mother, she still has a chance to “use her karmic situation to attain the aim of Buddhahood.” Many contemporary Vajrayāna teachers stand behind such statements, including H. H. the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, who states that women have greater potential, more sensitivity about others’ well-being, and greater compassion than men.

In regard to their role as consorts, women in Vajrayana are divided into different categories. One of the popular classifications of spiritual wives is based on the erotic tradition in India, particularly the *Ratirahasya* of Kokkoka (11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Ananga Ranga* of Kalyanamalla (16<sup>th</sup> century). These erotic manuals and the later *Samvarodaya tantra*, describe four types of *dakini* in the role of consort. They are associated with four of the five wisdom *dakinis*, which in turn are associated with the five spiritual wives of Padmasambhava, known in Tibetan Buddhism as the five *mudras* (*phyag rgya ma lnga*).

The paper will present some significant images of the *dakini* as consort in the Buddhist sacred art of Tibet. The emphasis will be on the two main spiritual wives of Padmasambhava, Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyal, whose iconographic forms will be analyzed through the prism of the doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha (*trikāya, sku gsum*). The images of the consorts of Indian and Tibetan *mahasiddhas* (*grub thob chen bo*) will also be explored according to their representations in Tibetan Buddhist art. These include the *dakinis* of Dobmipa, Ghantapa, Babhaha, Carbaripa, Saraha, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Maitripa, and others.

## **Spreading the Dharma is a Double-Edged Sword: Himalayan Buddhist Women as Messengers and Storytellers**

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*M. Alyson Prude*

In Vajrayana Buddhism, relaying messages has long been depicted as a feminine task. Whether goddesses, semi-divine beings, or ordinary women, tantric messengers include not only the well-known *dakini* and village oracle medium, but also messengers for the dead and the Lord of Death. The latter type of messenger is known, in Tibetan, as a *delog* (*'das log*). According to Tibetan Buddhists, a *delog's* consciousness leaves her physical body and journeys to the intermediate state (*bar do*) and beyond, often for a

period of several days. There, in the space that follows death, a *delog* witnesses the judgements of and accepts missives from the deceased. When she returns to her body, the *delog* relays news and communications from the dead, either reassuring the living that their loved one has found a favorable rebirth or alerting them to the need for merit-making rituals.

### **The History of Buddhist Education (*Pariyatti*) for Buddhist Nuns in Myanmar**

*Ma Vipula*

In any religion, learning and disseminating the doctrine are two important tasks for the preservation and propagation of the tradition. In Buddhism, *pariyatti* implies learning and teaching the Buddhadhamma. The term emphasizes the importance of learning and its dissemination as two of the most important duties for Buddhist monks and nuns. When we look back at the history of scriptural learning in Myanmar Buddhism, we find that it was important for Buddhist monks to learn and disseminate the scriptures in order to preserve the Buddha's legacy and propagate the Dhamma for future generations. Buddhist nuns also take on this responsibility and carry out their duties as best they can. However, in contrast to monks, in the past there were many obstacles that hindered Buddhist nuns from studying the scriptures. Nuns were not given the opportunity to study the higher levels of *pitaka* texts and also did not know how to acquire scriptural knowledge by themselves. Many Myanmar nun students struggled for decades to reach the level of monastic learning enjoyed today.

In this paper, I attempt to examine the history and development of nuns' monastic education in Myanmar. In particular, I focus on the following five issues: educational differences between monks and nuns; changes in the system of nuns' education; learning the Buddhist scriptures today; monastic centers for nun's education; and important nun scholars in Myanmar.

### **Women in Buddhism in Thailand: The Development of an Inequality Regime**

*Manuel Litalien*

If you educate a man, you educate an individual;  
but if you educate a woman, you educate a nation.  
~ Mahatma Gandhi

How can we understand development without examining the positive and negative impacts of religion across communities? In attempting to answer this question, Appleby spoke of the “ambivalence of the sacred” or how religion can be both an inspiration for peacebuilding and for terrorism. On one hand, religious organizations have been fundamental in providing humanitarian aid, yet on the other, religious actors have been capable of inspiring political and social violence.

This study examines how the role of Buddhist nuns (*bhikkhunis*) in Thailand is confronted with what can be understood as a religious “glass ceiling” or what is also known as an “inequality regime.” The latter rests on a restrictive perception of gender development in Buddhism created and endorsed by conservative Buddhist institutions, such as the Thai Buddhist monastic community (*sangha*). The study also looks how an “inequality regime” is constructed and configured through selected parameters of culture, religion, and notions of development. The subjective moral base of society is perceived as rigid and unchanging by the *sangha*. A glocalization strategy of the Thai *bhikkhunis* is further analysed to comprehend how Buddhism shapes individual values despite the current male-dominated cultural configuration. The study examines how this strategy operates as an empowerment factor for the promotion of gender equality in Theravāda Buddhism when a community is confronted with national limitations.

### **Teaching Against the Stream: Mexican Women Practicing the Dhamma in a Context of Violence, Exclusion, and Inequality**

*Marina Rojo Maurer and Iliana Córdoba Busto*

Mexico is currently an environment of conflict. Violence, corruption, and inequality permeate the daily lives of its people and cause extreme suffering to vulnerable groups, especially women, young people, and children. In this context, there is a constant search for religious, spiritual, and therapeutic practices to try to find relief and solutions to their difficult circumstances. Among these practices, we can find Buddhist teachings, which have been present in the country for decades. They exist not only due to the current situation, but are an indisputable part of the adaptation and diversity of Mexican cultures throughout history.

In this paper, first we will share the experience of two Mexican women Dhamma



practitioners who for five years have coordinated (with a third partner) a secular meditation practice group. We will discuss what has meant to establish the Buddhist teachings in their lives and their efforts to ensure the continuity of this practice community. Second, we will present a brief video that shows several women explaining how the practice of mindfulness, loving kindness, and compassion has benefitted them and enriched their daily life in the Mexican context.

Finally, we will reflect on the value of spiritual friendship and the importance of group spaces as places of hospitality, solidarity, contentment, and comradeship to allow gradual progress in the training and to restore trust among people. We will also discuss the contributions of Buddhist teachings to establish an ethics of respect for all, training the mind and gaining understanding to gain a clear view of reality as it is. On that basis, we will be better prepared to respond skillfully to the difficult conditions we face in these times of crisis, allowing practitioners to sustain a position contrary to the abuse of power and the dominant ideologies that exclude, discriminate, and in many cases destroy the possibility of a life with dignity and justice.

### **The Enlightened Female: Buddhism, Women, and Being a Mother**

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*Meg Adam*

One reason for the success of Buddhism in the West may be its appeal to women. The maternal metaphor, a prominent theme in Buddhist texts, is perhaps familiar and comforting to women and to mothers. By contrast, contextual literature poses challenging philosophical questions on whether motherhood is an obstacle on the path of renunciation or the greatest opportunity for women to follow the spiritual path. Yet, the literature has not addressed the issue of children joining their mothers on this path, and how this may or may not be encouraged in a Western context.

Traditionally, and in contemporary society in Asian countries, Buddhist institutions and Buddhist families are deeply and inevitably connected. However, in the West, it is often found that the relationships between religious authorities and institutions and those of families can be one of competition. It is therefore timely for further examination and appreciation of the centrality of family relationships in the Buddhist tradition, including those of mothers and children.

In seeking to understand the roles of Buddhist mothers and to explore the influence of Buddhism on being a mother, my PhD research raises questions about how Buddhism can influence, enhance, or pose challenges for the mother-child relationship. The key theories I investigate encompass historical and current ideologies of motherhood as well as real experiences of mothering from a Buddhist perspective and structure. One question that is central to this research is transgenerational – the passing down of Buddhist beliefs and practices from one generation to the next. How do mothers in the West who have adopted Buddhism, which some critique as not particularly child friendly, raise Buddhist children in a predominantly non-Buddhist culture? How do Buddhist mothers who have not grown up in a Buddhist culture or a Buddhist family present their Buddhist practice to their children? Or do they?

### **Contemporary Thai Buddhist Nuns: Monastic Discipline and Social Engagement**

*Monica Lindberg Falk*

In Thailand, women are active in the Buddhist field, both as supporters of male and female renunciants and as female Buddhist leaders. Today, Thai women who want to become ordained have at least two opportunities: either to become a *mae chi* or to become a *bhikkhuni*. Women's exclusion from the Thai *sangha* demonstrates that female renunciants have to create space outside the formal structures. Thai Theravāda Buddhist nuns (*mae chis*) have existed in Thailand for centuries and approximately 20,000 Buddhist nuns currently live in Thailand. The nuns' position outside the *sangha* makes their status somewhat ambiguous, since their position is context-dependent on whether they are considered to belong to the religious or the lay realm. However, their exclusion from the *sangha* has given nuns the opportunity to establish their own nunneries and the freedom to govern themselves.

This paper is based on long-term anthropological fieldwork and focuses on how Thai Buddhist nuns form religious cohesion. The paper addresses the rules and regulations that Thai nuns have set up to guide their lives in their communities. The Thai Nuns' Institute has played an important role in uniting the nuns. The activities and spatial organisation of the nuns who live at nunneries separate them from lay life and shape both their religious identity and their religious communities. This paper also addresses nuns' social engagement and discusses activities that involve lay people that, on the one hand, give the nuns religious authority, but, on the other hand, may also threaten the

nuns' own space and time to form their Buddhist community.

### **Mysteries of Tara: Texts, Images, Practices**

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*Neela Bhattacharya Saxena*

When Machik Labdron, the great *yogini* of Tibet, was meditating in her cave, Tara appeared to her and told her that Machik was a mind emanation of the Great Mother. To an incredulous Machik, Tara said "We are inseparable. You are the wisdom *dakini*, the sovereign of the great expanse [*vajradhatu*] and the source of liberation of all phenomena. Don't lose heart. Keep your determination."

Tara, a female Buddha, vows to retain her female body in enlightenment. She is a powerful meditation deity of Vajrayana Buddhism, and has many incarnations and forms. In India, Tara is worshiped in Shakta Hinduism as a Mahavidya and in Tantric Buddhism in both wrathful and peaceful aspects. She is the female aspect of Avalokitesvara; in one version of her story, Tara arises out of Avalokitesvara's tears for the suffering of sentient beings. She manifests in many colors and transmutations. In *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Benoytosh Bhattacharya cites meditation on Green Tara as Tarini (savior) in one of the early Vajrayana texts of *Advayavajrasangraha* that presents the green night lotus as her symbol. In the Vajratara Mandala of *Nispannayogavali*, we find this composite description: "Goddess Vajratara is of golden yellow colour. She is four faced. The principle face is golden in colour, the right is white, the one behind is blue and the red left. She has eight arms. In her four right hands she shows the Vajra, the noose, the arrow and the conch. In the four left she has the yellow night lotus, the bow, the goad, and the raised Tarjani."

In one form, as Khadiravani, Tara appeared to Nagarjuna in his journey toward awakening. When Atisha Dipankar was venturing out of his native India to far off Indonesia and Tibet, it was Arya Tara who was his guide and center of his devotion, who shone the light on his way. As Buddhism spreads to the western world, Tara appears as the most beloved figure of deity yoga.

In today's world, Tara is a paramount figure for Buddhist women as they awaken and transform the world around them with deep compassion for all. Tara can help women break out of patriarchal models and find their own agency and power. Tara's blessings to Machik Labdron to not lose heart and remain determined applies to all who are on

the path of Dharma. In this paper, I will make an attempt to trace her textual roots and explore her images and practices in order to better understand her relevance, both in contemplation and social action.

## **Comparative Study on Sarvastivada and Theravada *Bhikkhuni Pātimokka***

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*Nishadini Peiris*

The *bhikkhuni patimokkas* of the Mahasangika and Theravada schools exhibit similarities and differences, both in numbers and sections. The content of the *bhikkhuni vibhanga* of the two schools is more complicated than numbers and sections. The purpose of this research is to identify the similarities as well as the differences between the *bhikkhuni vibhanga* of the two schools to get a clearer picture of the philosophy behind the *bhikkhuni* disciplinary code.

The method I use in this research is documentary study. The *bhikkhuni patimokka* and the *bhikkhuni vibhanga* have sections that are similar and also sections that are different. A study of the content of the *bhikkhuni patimokkas* of the two schools reveals that the differences are not simply numerical. The *vinaya* rules in the *bhikkhuni patimokkas* of the two schools can be divided into these categories:

- Rules that are similar in both *patimokkas*;
- Rules that are not similar in the two *patimokkas*;

The rules that are not similar can be divided into three categories:

- Rules in the two *patimokkas* that are similar in some respects;
- Rules with the same content that are found in different categories; and
- Rules that are completely different in the two *patimokkas*.

According to the *bhikkhuni vibhanga*s of both schools, the *vinaya* rules of the *bhikkhuni patimokkas* of the two schools can be divided further as follows:

- Rules that are the same in both schools and have the same background stories;
- Rules that are the same in both schools and have different background stories;
- Rules that are the same in both schools, but with background stories that are not fully relevant to the rule.

It is clear that the *bhikkhuni patimokka* and the *bhikkhuni vibhanga* of both schools belong to the developing stage of the Tipitaka. As a result, both need to be studied in order to understand their true meaning and the philosophy behind the disciplinary code of the

*bhikkhunis.*

## **Monastic Life in the Modern World: Female Monasticism and the Disciplined Life of Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka**

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*Nirmala S. Salgado*

Based on research recently conducted in Sri Lanka, I will discuss how different types of institutions of Buddhist nuns promote specific communal rules and why they might address those rules in different ways. The paper will focus on communities of nuns that include both fully ordained *bhikkhunis* as well as *sil matas*, who dwell in teaching institutions and meditation centers throughout the country, and belong to a Theravada/Southern Buddhist tradition. I will demonstrate that while nuns living at the various centers focus on the cultivation of contemplative practices that are conducive to the eradication of obstacles on the path to *nirvana*, and aim at maintaining a disciplined and harmonious life in community, there are important differences in how and why nuns at different institutions engage monastic regulations.

My research has identified four variables that affect how monastic life in Sri Lanka today marks differences in regulations that nuns observe. These include: (1) the locale of the nuns, i.e., whether or not they live in teaching institutions or meditation centers; (2) the degree to which the nuns' centers are connected to the State monastic networks of monastics; (3) the extent to which nuns observe the recommendations of the Pali Vinaya; and (4) whether or not they have received the higher ordination. While these differences are present in the institutions to which Sri Lankan nuns belong, I also argue that how nuns at different institutions observe monastic discipline in their everyday lives is not as significantly different as one might think, since they share a common interpretation of the meaning and purpose of living a disciplined life in a Buddhist community – a life focused on contemplative practices that are central to who they are and how they live.

## **Violence Against Indigenous Women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

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*Parboti Roy*

Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh face multifaceted discrimination and deprivation,

and women are the most vulnerable in this regard. Indigenous women confront disparity, not only due to their gender but also due to their lower socio-economic and ethno-religious status. In recent years, violence against indigenous women has become a serious human rights concern. This paper focuses on the degree of gender-based violence against indigenous women in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and attempts to analyse the current situation of indigenous women following the theoretical approach of indigenous feminism and conceptual frameworks of nonviolence and peace.

The CHT has undergone a number of geopolitical changes in the name of development since the British colonial period. Indigenous women have become the most seriously affected population, which has not only affected them culturally and economically, but also their status as a religious minority. Even after independence in 1971, the rights of indigenous peoples were not well established in Bangladesh. In addition, national development plans, policies, and strategies tend to overlook the rights of indigenous women. It is reported that 434 indigenous women and girls fell victim to physical and sexual violence in 2015. The majority of perpetrators are from non-indigenous backgrounds and few are men from their own communities. The paper offers recommendations to ensure indigenous women's access to justice in order to address gender based violence.

### **Becoming Vajrayogini: Buddhist Women's Self Esteem Without Self**

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*Pema Khandro*

As Buddhism has crossed borders in the global context, contemporary Buddhist women have drawn heavily on positive female iconography from Tibet: becoming Vajrayogini, praying at the feet of White Tara, echoing the aspiration of Yeshe Tsogyal, and so on. While this should not be mistaken as representative of female equality in Buddhist history, it does express a primary function of Vajrayana iconography: to provide compelling models for invoking intrinsic confidence. This paper will explore the twin notions of non-self and robust identity in Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, contemplation, and transmission in terms of their implications for gender identity.

While non-self and robust identity are often considered contradictory, they have been treated as distinct issues throughout Buddhist history. In this case, "non-self" refers to

an ontological issue and the term “identity” refers to a psychological one. This distinction appears in five key areas of Buddhist thought which are reviewed in this paper. First, early Abhidharma acknowledged the functional necessity of conventional identity. Second, Madhyamaka acknowledged the soteriological benefits of collective identity. Third, Buddhist narratives of female heroines offer further frameworks for identity development. In cultures where identity is non-individualistic, narrative models may be the primary resource for making sense of oneself and one’s world. Furthermore, findings in cognitive science suggest that narrative models are primary factors in shaping cognition.

Fourth, Vajrayana contemplative practices point to the psychological potential of adopting positive models for identity. However, is it empowering for modern Buddhist women to adopt positive female iconography from a patriarchal culture? When modern Buddhist women outside Asian cultures envision themselves as Vajrayogini or White Tara, they may do so without Asian reference points for female social roles. Are they effectively activating the soteriological potential of this iconography or imposing modernist assumptions on Buddhist practice? Finally, the tradition of reincarnate teachers known as *tulkus* (Tibetan: *sprul sku*) has now been extended to women and even to a few Western women. While the institution of the *tulku* has been criticized by modern western male *tulkus*, such as Gesar Mukpo, how does the *tulku* institution function for contemporary western women? Is it unleashing its greatest potential in subaltern communities or ... offer an alternative interpretation, e.g., does it marginalize or even exploit women?

By exploring issues of identity in the historical, philosophical, contemplative, and contemporary settings, this paper will explore the questions surrounding women’s identity formation in the Buddhist context. It argues that elements of Buddhist philosophy, practice, and transmission may effectively serve as potent resources for women’s psychological empowerment while still remaining congruent with their traditional functions.

### **Gender Equality in the Buddha's Sangha: A Diversion of Practice from Theory**

*Reena Tuladhar*

Buddhism is widely known throughout the world as a religion of peace and kindness. Unfortunately, it is less known as a religion of gender equality. Virtually every school of



Buddhism seems to have developed a degree of gender bias, despite the best intentions of the Buddha. The Buddha showed great kindness and respect for women. Like a wise parent, the Buddha took care to protect the *bhikkhunis*. But the status of *bhikkhunis* today is far from what the Buddha endorsed. At present, those nuns who are not fully ordained are known as *das sil mata* in Sri Lanka, *thilasin* in Myanmar, *mae chii* in Thailand, and Laos, *siladharas* in the West, *anagarika* in Nepal, and so on. These nuns are not granted official endorsement or the educational and financial support offered to *bhikkhus*.

Patriarchy, prevalent in society since the Buddha's time, continues to influence and shape contemporary Buddhism today. The Buddha's original teachings over 2,500 years ago did not discriminate against women. However, because his teachings were passed down orally, mostly through male teachers after his *mahaparinirovana*, Buddhism today is filtered, formed, and designed through patriarchy. The doctrinal equality taught by the Buddha is rarely seen in practice today. There may be a few exceptionally good places for women's to practice, but in most cases Buddhist nuns have a difficult time finding support and all too often are relegated to the role of kitchen help.

The situation in the Nepalese tradition is not an exception to the situation mentioned above. At various rituals and functions, both monks and nuns are invited to perform religious rituals and Dhamma teachings. As ordained practitioners, Buddhist nuns usually perform these duties equally, but usually get less honor, respect, and donations than the monks do. In Nepal, society tends to accept the nuns mostly in supportive and subservient positions. At monasteries with education programs, the nuns serve meals to the teacher and student monks as well as their own regular breakfast and lunch. In addition, whenever there is a special function or ceremony in the monastery, the nuns are asked to prepare the food, while monks are found busy with their own studies.

This paper attempts to address the following questions: What is the status of the Buddhist nuns in Nepal at present? Is the ordained life of the Buddhist nuns in Nepal fruitful for them? Are the contributions made by Buddhist nuns well recognized by the Buddhist community in Nepal? First, I will conduct an initial survey to gather data. Next, I will develop a systematic questionnaire to specifically address these questions and administer it to Buddhist nuns in Nepal, who will be selected according to objective criteria. The study will be limited to the Theravada Buddhist tradition in Nepal and will not address other Buddhist schools.

## **“Women who Know about That”: Midwives and Wise Women in Buddhist Literature**

*Robert Kritzer*

Buddhist texts can tell us something about the knowledge about childbirth possessed by midwives and other “wise women” in ancient India. In what I have read so far, such women are designated by phrases meaning intelligent or sagacious. In the *Garbhāvakraṅtisūtra*, the Buddhist embryological *sūtra*, which I have recently edited and translated, “women who are skilled in that” are called upon to remove a dead fetus when it has died in the womb. This passage is quoted in *Abhidharmakośabhāya*, where the phrase used is “women who know about that.”

Several stories in both the Vinaya texts and Avadānas mention wise pregnant women who have five special qualities, including the ability to tell whether conception will occur and the ability to predict the sex of their child. Abhidharma texts also discuss this sort of knowledge. I will survey these stories and other passages that refer to knowledge regarding conception, gestation, and childbirth. I will examine the skills and activities of these wise women and the way they are viewed in the literature. Indian medical texts such as *Carakasa hitā* and *Suśrutasa hitā* also mention women with special knowledge and abilities regarding childbirth, and I will investigate the relationship between the medical and the Buddhist literature.

## **Conventional Practice, Unconventional Meanings: Being and Becoming Buddhist Women**

*Sandra Ng Siow San*

It is said that before his passing, the honored founding teacher of Buddhism, Buddha Sakyamuni, taught his disciples the importance of four places related to his life and advised his disciples to visit them for spiritual encouragement. These four places became the sacred Buddhist sites: the birthplace, the site of awakening, the site of the first teaching, and the final resting place of Buddha Sakyamuni. The journey of life is parallel to a pilgrimage. The inward pilgrimage of a Buddhist is through introspection and the discovery of one’s inner nature. Therefore, for a Buddhist, the idea of traveling to a sacred place is parallel to life, in that the pilgrim’s “personal experience becomes an integral component of understanding or ‘testing’ Buddhist teaching.” This is visible in the experience of going on pilgrimage with Buddhists from Malaysia and Singapore

who are ethnically Chinese – a potentially transformative experience related to their religious or spiritual well-being.

While I am aware that mindfulness practice is not exclusive to the Buddhist tradition and contemplatives, for the purpose of this essay, I will privilege selected narratives out of a total of 27: nine Malaysian Chinese Buddhist laypersons, nine Singaporean Chinese Buddhist laypersons, and nine Buddhist spiritual mentors. Of the nine Buddhist spiritual mentors, four are Buddhist monastics (two Australians, one Malaysian, and one Sri Lankan) and five are Buddhist lay mentors (four Malaysians and one Singaporean). I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face audio interviews as a method of data collection for my Ph.D. thesis project. Through the narratives of two Singaporean Buddhist women of ethnic Chinese background, I demonstrate the personal introspection and mindful practice of their being and becoming Buddhist through doing pilgrimage to illustrate expressions of spirituality (as compared to religiosity). The narratives also illustrate the sense of becoming spiritual, externalized through their Buddhist education and growth, to demonstrate that doing pilgrimage is unavoidable, despite the non-obligatory nature of the pilgrimage practice in the Buddhist tradition. This essay thus aims to contribute to an under-researched area of scholarship pertaining to pilgrimage in the Buddhist traditions, and to an understanding of religiosity and/or spirituality of Buddhists in Singapore.

### **Political Involvement in Buddhist Activities: The Case of Contemporary Theravāda Nuns in Myanmar**

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*Sayalay Amita*

As a female and feminist who ordained and lived in Myanmar for two years, I sometimes feel that the disparity between monks and nuns in the country is very unfair, due to traditional perspectives and customs. While living in the country, I was in touch with some outstanding nuns, such as Sayalay Dipankara. Perhaps the most famous one is Daw Sei Ka Vati, the first nun to hold a *mahadana* (great offering) for 10,000 monastics, both monks and nuns, in Yangon in 2015. Some insiders feel that the key to her success is that she maintains good relations with the government. Furthermore, she was appointed by the general secretary of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) as the principal person to take care of orphans after the civil war in Laokai, Shan State. This interested me, because government officials rarely collaborate with leading nuns on community development projects in Myanmar.

The main objective of this essay is to raise questions, provoke insights, and contribute some experience of nuns' social activities in Theravada Buddhist countries. Among the specific research questions I wish to address are as follows: Do nuns in Myanmar have clear political views and are they divided into nationalist and democratic camps like the monks' communities are, e.g., Ma Ba Tha (the Patriotic Association of Myanmar)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of cooperating with established political parties in community activities? How can one work skillfully, so as to not act contrary to the Dhamma?

In a traditional Theravāda country like Myanmar, both government officers and political parties may utilize religious power to solve regional problems, in order to build a sympathetic image and gain support from the public. Stereotypical female characteristics, such as diligence, blandness, and caution may help them become accepted by the public more easily. By contrast, the nuns, who are politically weaker and have lower status than the monks, need the protection and support of the officials to develop their Buddhist activities.

The methodology of this paper includes the systematic collection of documentation and analysis of public policies. I intend to investigate relevant public policies from government documents and news reports. The focus will be policies related to politics, economics, gender, and education. Next, I will conduct a series of policy analyses, including one on Ba Ma Tha. I will conduct field research, including a series of in-depth interviews with Daw Sei Ka Vati, accompanied by a local translator. Moreover, I will participate in a *mahadana* in Pyay, Bago, which is one of the largest activities she co-hosts with the general secretary. I will follow the event to get collect first-hand information and listen to different voices on the way.

## **Social Change, Breath by Breath**

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*Shelley Anderson*

This paper looks at how the Order of Interbeing (OI) integrates Buddhist mindfulness practice into its members' work for social change. The OI began with six lay social activists during 1966 in war-torn Vietnam. It now has 4,000 members, both lay and ordained, throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. The OI was founded by the Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, with the active support of Cao Ngoc Phuong (now

Sister Chan Khong), to support the engaged Buddhist practice of young Vietnamese social workers. OI members take specific *bodhisattva* vows encapsulated in 14 Mindfulness Trainings and commit themselves to 60 days of mindfulness practice per year.

The paper will give a short history of the OI, look at teachings on engaged Buddhism, and at specific Buddhist practices within the Order. OI projects in Vietnam and in Liberia will be explored, along with my own experiences as an OI member working with women in conflict zones. I will also focus on the Wake-Up movement, an international group of young people practicing in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh who have specific concerns about the environment and gender equality. The presentation will begin and end with songs from Plum Village, the retreat center of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Chan Khong, and from the European Institute of Applied Buddhism (in Germany).

### **Dr. Ambedkar's Vision of Gender Equality and Its Impact on Indian Women**

*Siddharth Singh*

Navayāna Buddhism, also known as Neo-Buddhism or Ambedkar's Buddhism, is the symbol of revival of Buddhism in India. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the founder of this revival, believed that the status of women fell in the course of Indian history due to Hindu beliefs, which inherently promote discrimination and inequality in every sphere of life. In his writings and speeches, including his famed article titled "The Rise and Fall of Hindu Woman," Dr. Ambedkar devoted a large section to the higher status of women endorsed by the Buddha as compared to their degraded status in early forms of Hinduism/Brahmanism. He endeavoured to prove that the idea of gender equality is engrained in the Buddha's words and any negative remarks about women that may be found in Buddhist literature have either been misunderstood or interpolated. Could this vision of Dr. Ambedkar pertaining to women achieving higher status by converting to Buddhism be fruitful? Could he incorporate the necessary rules and regulations into Indian constitution to fulfil his dream of gender equality in India?

Contemplating these issues in general, this paper reflects on the place of women in Indian Navayāna Buddhism with the following objectives:

- To study the views of Dr. Ambedkar about women in general.
- To study the views of Dr. Ambedkar on "the rise and fall of Hindu women."

- To investigate the role of Buddhist ideals in the formation of Dr. Ambedkar's views on gender equality.
- To study Dr. Ambedkar's role as a father of the Indian Constitution in the empowerment of Indian women.
- To study the roles of women in Dr. Ambedkar's Buddhist revivalist movement.
- To evaluate the positive and/or negative impact of conversion on the status of Neo-Buddhist women.

## **Breaking the Boundary: The Transformation of Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Hong Kong**

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*Sik Fa Ren*

Under the influence of humanistic Buddhism, monastic Buddhists are classified in two main categories: ritualist monastics (*jing chan seng*) and scholarly monastics (*xue wen xeng*). This paper will discuss the transformation of Buddhist nuns in Hong Kong in the contemporary period using this typography.

Historically, most Buddhist rituals could only be performed and presided over by monks, whereas nuns, regarded as inferior, could only be participants. This situation is now beginning to change in Hong Kong. More nuns are involved in organizing important rituals and in assisting ritual masters during the performance of rituals, due to a scarcity of monks in Hong Kong. These nuns are breaking through the gender boundary by participating in liturgical teams. As a result, nuns are no longer in a subordinate position as passive participants in Buddhist liturgies, but are now playing leading roles. Not only are they organizing rituals, they are also exercising their power to choose who will be invited to preside over and perform the rituals. This change of emphasis in the nuns' roles may reflect a shift in social relationships, power negotiations, and gender roles, both within Buddhist institutions and in society at large.

Historically, Buddhist nuns could only be the students of the monks. This situation is changing now in Hong Kong. More nuns are trained to teach both the monastics and lay Buddhists. Some monks are also the students of nuns. Teaching Buddhism is no longer monopolized by monks in Hong Kong. This paper will document these important changes for nuns in both scholarship and ritual practice.

## **Himalayan Feminism**

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*Sonam Choden*

Tibetan Buddhism began in India, developed in Tibet, and spread to neighbouring

countries in proximity to the Himalayas, including Bhutan and many areas of India. Tibetan Buddhism has gained popularity because the teachings of the Buddha are considered to be impartial, but the experiences of Tibetan Buddhist nuns have not been adequate to uphold Buddhism's egalitarian philosophy. Large numbers of women in India follow Tibetan Buddhism and their experiences deserve more research and writing. Therefore, this paper will address the current situation of nuns practicing in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition who are living in Sikkim to understand their perceptions of the realities around them. Buddhism is still largely dominated by men and Tibetan Buddhism is no exception. Conditions for nuns are bound to remain stagnant if they are shoved into silence, because things have been running quite smoothly for ages without questioning the oppressive system. Internalized misogyny is deeply rooted in our culture and has made male dominance seem natural – an accepted reality. Gender discrimination is a setback for nuns practicing Buddhism, particularly when they are made to feel inferior and advised to seek a male rebirth.

When I asked why there were fewer nuns than monks in the Tibetan tradition, one monk responded, "There have been female deities like Tara and Bhikshuni Palmo. There are no great Buddhist masters who are female; they will be men, because it is easier for men in every respect – not just in staying alone, but in other ways, too. You can also think about the difficulties women have to go through. That is a major difference. You should also understand what things women cannot do and men can." This response reflects the typical attitude toward nuns and women in general. Today, nunneries should no longer be second-tier institutions, as they have been treated in the past. If Buddhism is all about being awakened and unpacking our potential to generate compassion and wisdom to the fullest, then nothing should act as a hindrance in women's development.

The aims of this study are: (1) to understand the current situation of nuns in Tibetan Buddhism as related to their education and welfare; (2) to explore their understanding of being a nun in the larger monastic context; and (3) to examine the effects of invisible patriarchy on nuns. Specific sampling techniques were used to identify key informants, both monks and nuns. Nuns were interviewed in their nunneries and monks were interviewed according to their availability. My initial point of contact was my father, who referred me to two nunneries that were contacted in advance.

### **Buddhism, Equality, and Feminism: Embodied Practices**

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*Suat Yan Lai*

This paper explores the connection between notions and meanings of Buddhism, equality, and feminism as embodied practices, based on our grounded experiences at the ideal and personal levels. It engages with discourses that question the use of the terms feminism or equality in relation to representations of what it means to be a Buddhist or a Buddhist nun, deeming them colonialist or an imposition by Western ideals and notions. While acknowledging the contribution of postcolonial studies that critique the representation of Asian or non-Western women as monolithic, static, or the exotic other, this paper argues that notions of equality and feminism are not alien to non-Western nations. In fact, there is a diversity of what it means to be Asian and this does not necessarily exclude notions of equality and feminism. Similarly, to be a Buddhist or a Buddhist nun does not necessarily exclude these notions. In fact, based on my experiences of doing research and my engagement to support the establishment of the female monastic order in Thailand and Malaysia, this paper argues that, in fact, there are those who identify as feminists that support such initiatives and may become nuns themselves, whether temporarily or permanently. However, the ways in which they frame themselves or position themselves and their initiatives depend on social context and timing. The paper problematizes the diversity and fluidity of what it means to be a Buddhist and a feminist in the Asian context and, at the same time, engages with the intersection of postcolonialism, gender, and religious studies.

### **The Interface Between Buddhism and Western Meditation-Based Secular Interventions**

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*Teresa I. (Teri) Sivilli*

One afternoon at the 2015 Sakyadhita Conference, the leaders convened focus groups on topics generated by the participants. I suggested and led a group about the interface between Buddhism and the Buddhist-based interventions that are flourishing in the West. The best-known and most-researched of these include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Cognitively-Based Compassion Training (CBCT), and Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT). A group of participants has continued a conversation about this. One thing that is clear from the conference conversations and ensuing discussions is that many people who are very educated about Buddhism are not at all familiar with the Buddhism-based interventions that have become popular for everything from stress reduction to addiction treatment

to pain management. In addition, as “mindfulness” and “compassion” in their many guises have gained popularity in schools, corporations, and other mainstream settings in the United States and elsewhere, many people have proclaimed themselves to be teachers of these techniques, even though they have few qualifications to do so.

This paper is an overview of the main interventions, their development, and their sources within Buddhism and other traditions. It addresses the applications of these interventions and the research evidence for their effectiveness. Among the questions it asks are:

- Is it possible to teach meditation effectively outside the context of culture and ethics? What is being transmitted through these programs?
- What is gained and lost by teaching meditation in a secular context?
- From a Buddhist perspective, what are the dangers of people teaching meditation when they have not been trained in any Buddhist tradition?
- From a secular perspective, what issues arise if these interventions are taught only by people with a background in Buddhism?

### **From Well-known Businesswoman to Vietnamese Vajrayana Buddhist Nun**

*Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet*

This article is a study of a path of a well-known businesswoman in Vietnam who became to become a Vajrayana Buddhist nun. Her lay name is Huynh Long Ngoc Diep and her Dharma name is Duc Tam. Ngoc Diep was born in 1971 in a large, poor family in Cu Chi District, a suburb of Saigon. Due to her difficult family circumstances, she had to work very hard since childhood. She could not enjoy her teenage years either, because she had to work diligently to support her parents in raising her four younger sisters and brothers. However, being strong and highly motivated, she nurtured a passion for education and was determined to get out of poverty. A gifted student, she took every chance to learn.

After graduating from high school, Ngoc Diep started a small business and kept working hard until the business grew big. Today, she is a well-known, very successful businesswoman, both the president of Ngoc Viet Joint Stock Company and the director of Huynh Long Company. She has also worked very hard to promote Buddhism in Vietnamese society. For example, she opened Viet Chay Restaurants, a chain of vegetarian restaurants at various Buddhist temples, to encourage people to eat

vegetarian food. She also established Mani Buddhist Communication Company; Ngoc Viet Travel Company, for Buddhist pilgrims; Phap Hoa Supermarket, which sells many Buddhist items; and Phap Phuc Lam Hien Garment Factory, which specializes in making Buddhist clothes. She also organizes programs such as “Quality of Life” to spread Buddhist knowledge and “Songs of Love” to encourage and enrich Buddhist music.

This paper will explore a number of questions to better understand Ngoc Diep’s well-publicized decision to take ordination. Why did she decide to leave behind all her fame, positions, and material comforts to follow the life of a nun? Why did she choose to follow the path of Vajrayana, a difficult path in the context of Vietnamese society, where nearly 90 percent of all Buddhists follow the Mahayana tradition and the Vajrayana school is not widely accepted? Was her decision a result of her meeting with H.H. the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama or were there other motivating factors? Has she encountered obstacles in practicing the spiritual life? Has she maintained her businesses since becoming a nun? What has she gained from being ordained as a Vajrayana nun?

An understanding of the life choices of the businesswoman Ngoc Diep, who is now a nun named Tam Duc, is relevant and timely in an era when opportunities for Buddhist women have expanded. This article will be both an academic study, based on written documents, and an personal account of a woman who has always kept in mind the thought, “my duty is to help others.” With this noble intention, she has made great contributions to the both the material and spiritual well-being of countless people in Vietanemse society, particularly in the Buddhist community. This paper will document her story.

### **Following Old Trails, Breaking new Ground: The Establishment of Shide, the First Tibetan Buddhist Nunnery in Germany**

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*Thubten Choedroen, Namgyal Chökyi, and Yeshe Metog*

Monastic life in the modern world has special challenges. Monastic life should mainly be based on the *vinaya* and this can only be practiced in a community. In our individualized society of the modern world, however, it is difficult to find communities of Buddhist nuns dedicating their lives collectively to the Dharma. Many reasons could be identified for the unsatisfactory situation of Buddhist nuns in the West, some related

to the monastics themselves, some to lay practitioners, to society, and so on. But instead of spending time analyzing the causes, why not try to create better circumstances and break new ground while still following the old trail of the Buddha?

Two Western *bhiksunis* pragmatically took the first step and founded a small Tibetan Buddhist nunnery in northern Germany. Fortunately, they had some financial resources and help from their families to start the project. Together with a handful of committed laywomen, they established a charitable organization at the end of 2015 and called it Buddhist Nunnery Shide (Peace and Happiness). The *bhiksunis* generously donated the first residential house of the new nunnery to this association. In March 2016, the two *bhiksunis* and one *sramanerika* moved into this building. Their vision is to live in a German-speaking *bhiksuni sangha* practicing Tibetan Buddhism. For the *sangha* to be able to grow, they plan to buy the neighboring piece of land for a shrine and a house for more nuns.

The nunnery is envisaged as a place of contemplation where ordained women can study and practice the Dharma intensively in a monastic context as a way of life. We are interested in exchanging experiences with other nunneries and associations. Networking and a learning platform could be useful for this. In the long run, we hope to plant firm monastic roots in the West.

Some of the questions we face are: What would a monastic training program for educated, professional women look like? How can we really live the rules given by the Buddha more than 2,500 years ago in our modern world? Which elements of Asian Buddhist nunneries should be adopted or not? How can we structure a daily routine; for example, how much time should be devoted to individual practice and to group practice? We would like to report on our experience, exchange ideas, and openly discuss questions, challenges, and experiences, including the sunny side and the difficulties we experience.

### **Buddhist Concepts of Gender Equality from the Viewpoint of Male/Female Childbirth in Vietnamese Society**

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*Tong Thi Quynh Huong*

Under the influence of Confucianism over thousands of years, patriarchal ideology gradually became ingrained in the minds of many generations of Vietnamese people.

Due to the value of a son, it became very important for women to produce a male child for her husband. If a woman for some reason could not give birth to a son, she would be considered defective and become the cause of disagreements and quarrels between her and her husband and between her and her husband's family. This led to many tragedies in Vietnamese families.

However, the expectation of "having a son" is not at all related to the Buddhist worldview. With the arrival of Buddhism in Vietnam, attitudes toward women gradually changed. Now women are more respected and are seen as individuals who can contribute to the development of society, not just as property belonging to her husband. According to Buddhism, the rights and duties of women are not limited to childbirth or parenting. Women are an inseparable part of society. Childbirth and parenting are significant contributions to human development, but women also have other capabilities. This paper will analyze the roles of women and Buddhist concepts of gender equality from the viewpoint of male and female childbirth in Vietnamese society.

### **The Gurudharma Rules for Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Mainland China**

*Tzu-Lung (Melody) Chiu*

Since the first nun, Mahāprajāpatī, accepted the eight "fundamental rules" almost two and a half millennia ago, the *gurudharma* rules have had a profound impact on the subordination of the nuns' order to the monks' order. Consequently, these rules have been the subject of considerable debate in the past and present. This paper examines how the term *gurudharma* is interpreted and practiced today at a variety of different Buddhist nunneries in mainland China in order to understand how female monastic members understand and interpret the *vinaya* in their everyday lives.

Today, a revival of Chinese Buddhism is taking place in mainland China and there has been an increase of the population of Buddhist nuns, which is estimated at around 60,000-70,000 (including Tibetan nuns). The educational standards of Chinese Buddhist nuns have also risen in recent decades. Against this backdrop, this study explores the religious life of present-day Chinese Buddhist nuns through multiple-case studies that I conducted at seven monastic institutions in mainland China and aims to present new insight into how female monastics practice and observe the *gurudharmas*. I intend to present the nuns' voices regarding each of the rules in detail, one by one, allowing us to

understand various situations and issues from their perspective, including bowing to monks, dual ordination, and instruction practices.

This paper is the result of a long-term empirical study conducted in nunneries in mainland China, which have been relatively understudied until now. My aim is to provide a detailed overview of how the Vinaya rules are observed and how traditional procedures are carried out by Buddhist nuns, to better understand their perceptions of the *gurudharmas* in Chinese monastic communities.

### **Buddhist Woman as Agent of Change: The Story of Bhikkhunī Pu Hui**

*Wei-Yi Cheng*

Many scholars believe that Buddhism in Taiwan manifested in a form of householder practice called the vegetarian sect, or *zhaijiao*, prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It is often assumed that the advent of a Chinese monastic *sangha* brought changes to the expression of Buddhist religiosity in Taiwan. Fingers are usually pointed to mainland Chinese monks who migrated to Taiwan after 1949 for “erasing” *zhaijiao* practice and establishing the Chinese monastic order in Taiwan. What is seldom noticed is the role played by Buddhist women themselves who, in existing scholarly discourse, are generally perceived as passive recipients of changes and whose voices are almost never heard in scholarly works. This paper will bring attention to these Buddhist women themselves. Through the method of in-depth interviews, this paper will focus on one Buddhist woman who is the abbess of a formerly *zhaijiao* temple that is now a *bhikkhunī* temple. Through her life story, we may glimpse how Buddhist women can be agents of change of their own religiosity.

Bhikkhunī Pu Hui, the subject of discussion in this paper, was among the recipients of the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award in 2016. This testifies to her achievements as a prominent Buddhist woman and her contributions to social work. I will first introduce her life story, especially her relationship with her tonsure master, the late Bhikkhunī De Xi. Bhikkhunī De Xi was ordained as a member of *zhaijiao*, as a *zhaiigu* or “vegetarian woman,” but later led other female members of her temple to receive

*bhikkhunī* ordination. Through Bhikkhunī Pu Hui's retelling of her tonsure master's decision to receive *bhikkhunī* ordination, I wish to learn about the motivation behind this religious transformation. Next, I will discuss the social work that Bhikkhunī Pu Hui undertook. The website of the Outstanding Women in Buddhism Award 2016 describes her as having "invested all of her life in social work, community service, and propagation of Buddha-Dharma." What motivates her to engage in social work? How is Buddhism related to her social work? By discussing these questions, I wish to better understand the work of Bhikkhunī Pu Hui and answer questions about whether she is a passive actor or an active agent in Buddhist practice.

Bhikkhunī Pu Hui is the abbess of Shen Zhai Tang, a temple established in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that is, according to some, the oldest *zhaijiao* temple in the Taichung area. This paper is therefore not only about the life story of one Buddhist woman, but also about the history of an important formerly *zhaijiao* temple. Above all, I wish to fill the void that exists in the absence of Buddhist women's voices in the study of *zhaijiao* and the transformation of Buddhist practice in Taiwan.

### **Breaking the Glass Ceiling: For a Future to be Possible for Monastics in the West**

*Yeshe Bodhicitta*

Many people know that Non Himalayan monastics have very little support and a 75 percent rate of disrobing rate, and that there is some gender inequality in Tibetan Buddhism. What has not been widely discussed is what is at the root of this condition and how women contribute to patriarchy. Why are Western monastics important for the future of Buddhism, what do they contribute, and what did the Buddha say about monasticism?

In this paper, I share my life as an Australian Buddhist nun, my encounter with patriarchy and discrimination, and how I overcame these obstacles to start a socially engaged Buddhist charity in the slums of Central India. The paper also looks at the causes of inequality between Tibetan *lamas* and their non-Himalayan nun disciples, and how the reification of one particular culture and internalized patriarchy may be harming the development of a healthy, autonomous, and gender-equal fourfold Buddhist *sangha* in the West.

Kalyanamitra Foundation is a charity that has worked for 14 years with non-Himalayan



monastics to offer scholarships, counseling, and support. This paper includes the results of our survey on the living situation of some non-Himalayan monastics and offers possible solutions to the problem: for women to unite to end gender and racial discrimination, take our lives back into our own hands, and work together to create a future for Buddhism the fourfold sangha that is authentic and inclusive.

### **A Comparative Study of Korean Seon and Chinese Chan Women Masters: Myori Beophui and Qiyuan Xinggang**

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*Youngsuk Jun*

This paper will discuss two women Seon (Chan) masters in comparative perspective. Qiyuan Xinggang (1597–1654) was a woman Seon master who lived during the late Ming to early Qing Dynasty period. Myori Beophui (1887–1975) was a Seon master in the world of Korean Buddhist nuns who lived from the late Joseon Dynasty period to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Because they lived in turbulent eras, they suffered personal misfortunes. They became nuns with the strong identity of a Seon (Chan) meditation master and were finally able to achieve enlightenment.

This paper researches the following points. First, how did they achieve enlightenment? Second, after achieving enlightenment, how did they organize and lead the religious community for woman? How were their organizations different from male masters' communities? Although they lived in an age different from our own, what can we learn from them when we create Seon (Chan) meditation communities for women?

### **Several Mothers in Buddhist Biographical Literature: A Textual Study**

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*Yuande Shih*

Buddhist biographical literature can be traced back to the early canonical fragments in the *Mahāvagga* and *Mahāvastu*. The more mature biographical literatures only appeared around the second century of the common era. Among of them, the *Buddhacarita* (Acts of the Buddha), composed by *Aśavoghosa* in Sanskrit is the best representation. Although the *Mahāvagga* sheds some fragmented light on the lives of some chief disciples, these accounts function simply to supplement the great life of the Buddha himself.

Later, some Chinese monks developed biographical literature about contemporary

eminent monks and nuns. The *Biographies of the Eminent Monks (Gaosengzhuan)* of Huijiao (497-554) and the *Biographies of Nuns* of his contemporary monk Baochang represent this development. So far, however, there are no biographical works specifically composed about the mothers of those sagely monks or nuns. We do not even have comprehensive biographical accounts of the two mothers of the Buddha himself. Sadly, although there is mention of some Buddhist mothers in their sagely sons' biographies, they were unfortunately treated as devices to deliver their saintly sons into this human realm. These mothers include Māyā, the biological mother of the Buddha. Now, at a time when Buddhist teachings are enthusiastically applied by more and more modern women to understand motherhood, the accounts of often-ignored Buddhist mothers deserve greater attention and respect.

In this paper, based on biographical accounts found in the canonical texts, I intend to draw out clear images of several Buddhist mothers in the texts, including the Buddha's two mothers Māyā and Prājapāti Gautamī; Sāriputra's mother Rūpasārī; and Kumārajīva's mother Jīva. In my conclusion, I will argue that a mother's love extends beyond just being the location and device for her son's birth, upbringing, and supervision, but also reveals her support for her son's spiritual practice. Since the mother's love has always been promoted in Buddhism, it stands to reason that we should support these mothers' own spirituality.

### **From “Vegetarian Women” to “Female Volunteers” to “Dharma Aunties”: The Institutionalization of Buddhist Women's Affiliation with Monastic Sangha in Contemporary Taiwan**

*Yu-chen Li*

In this paper, I will trace and examine the ways in which lay Buddhist women have affiliated themselves with monastic organizations and how their affiliations have gone through significant changes in contemporary urbanized society, such as in Taiwan. Traditionally, without much mobility or independent livelihood, women usually participated in the religious events held in the neighboring areas of their husbands' residence. Those who were particularly religious might seek to become followers of a certain monk or nun and reside in the temple of that monk or nun in their old age, but the monastics and temples they had access to were still in the same geographic area as their husbands' families. In Taiwan, such geography-and-kinship-based patterns of religious affiliation gradually dissolved after the 1970s when the society went through a

rapid process of industrialization and urbanization, which released women from the confinement of their previous social networks. With more access to education and work, Taiwanese women have gained greater social and geographic mobility; they frequently move around the island or even overseas for advanced education and/or jobs.

Today, Taiwan-based Buddhist organizations are famous for their nationwide and global reach. Tzu Chi (Ciji) Buddhist Compassion Relief and Foguangshan (Buddha Light Mountain) are two prominent examples of Taiwan-based global Buddhist organizations. I will investigate the ways in which lay Buddhist women's affiliation with these organizations are institutionalized. My preliminary conclusion is that these hierarchical organizations have benefitted greatly from institutionalizing laywomen's affiliation with them and, in turn, have established and promoted a new pattern of women's association with each other. This paper will shed light on the emerging new public sphere for Buddhist women in urbanized and globalized society.

### **Empowering the Dreams of the Poor through Transdisciplinary Cooperation**

*Zizhou Shi*

In this paper, I will present the ways in which the Luminary Research Institute has utilized a transdisciplinary approach to transform a poor community and school in Taiwan. The methods used are mindful education, public art, and cultural innovation. The school is named Meihua Elementary School and is located in a poor rural community in northern Taiwan. The school was nearly abandoned by the government, because the number of students was less than 60 and each year the number was decreasing. The administrators and teachers were conscious of this situation, but could not do anything to improve it. Moreover, the local economy and work opportunities in the community are not good. Consequently, many of the youth move out for work. It is only those who are too old or unable to move away who stay.

Since August 2014, the Luminary Research Institute has cooperated with Barefoot Artists (particularly Lily Yeh), scholars, and experts to initiate a project called Empower the Dreams of Rural Areas and to teach an art class at Meihua Elementary School. In Stage One, we teach art classes and hold mindful meditation sessions at Meihua Elementary School. The goal is to transform the negative image and mindset that teachers and students may have toward the Meihua community and to cultivate

students' potential, build their confidence, and nurture their community identity. In Stage Two, we invite more scholars and experts to come work in the Meihua community. We set up tutoring classes for youth to help them improve their studies and also teach various vocational skills to help residents find jobs. In the long run, we aim to transform the Meihua community into a cultural and educational park in which people can study public art, natural ecosystems, and the historical development of early Taiwan. These potential resources of the Meihua community have been overlooked. It is hoped that after five years, Meihua will no longer be a poor community, but instead a shining new cultural and education park.