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Compassion & Social Justice: 14th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women

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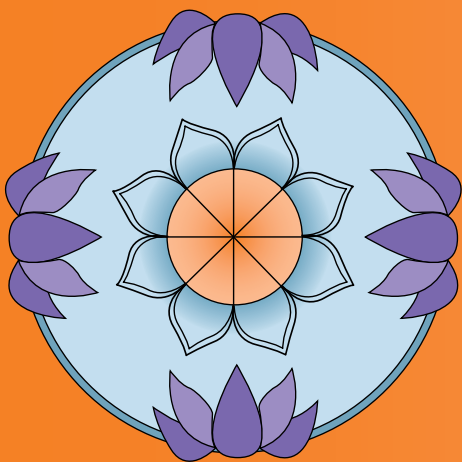
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Sakyadhita

14th International Conference
on Buddhist Women

“Compassion and Social Justice”

Yogyakarta, Indonesia
June 23 to 30, 2015

COMPASSION & SOCIAL JUSTICE

**Edited by
Karma Lekshe Tsomo**

PUBLISHED BY
Sakyadhita
Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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PREFACE

The 14th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is an extraordinary crosscultural opportunity. Focusing on the theme “Compassion and Social Justice,” the conference introduces activists of the social justice movements in Indonesia and other Asian countries to Buddhist feminist wisdom, social analysis, lives, and experiences. At the same time, it introduces Buddhist communities to Indonesian activists and local social justice movements. The conference provides a space for attendees, volunteers, interpreters, and seminar and workshop presenters of different backgrounds to interact and break down perceived barriers. It creates a foundation for future collaborations among Buddhist feminists and social justice activists and encourages women’s groups in Indonesia to include feminist Buddhist views in their future programs and activities on pluralism.

The papers in this collection celebrate the many contributions Buddhist women have made to the spiritual and social lives of people in their communities around the world. As at previous Sakyadhita International Conferences on Buddhist Women, the gathering includes meditation, panel discussions, workshops, artwork, cultural performances, and tours. This conference also highlights the achievements of Buddhist lay and monastic women and their ongoing struggles for human rights and gender equity. The aim is to expand Buddhist women’s awareness of the social and political processes that shape their communities and global society. Buddhist women’s spirituality, for example, is not typically included in the negotiation processes among government officials, scholars, social activists, and religious leaders who meet to discuss humanity’s collective future. Most decision makers and social justice movements are not familiar with the work of Buddhist women. Similarly, most Buddhist women are not familiar with the larger social, economic, and political complexities that affect their daily lives. Due to their unfortunate circumstances (poverty, illiteracy, political oppression, and so on) and inadequate access to information about global issues, they may be unaware that the spirituality, compassion, and ethical principles of their cultural heritage could contribute substantially to shaping a more just and peaceful world.

The 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Yogyakarta is timely, considering the growing religious, national, and ethnic intolerance found everywhere in Asia, including in Indonesia. This trend of growing intolerance triggers divisions in societies where people previously lived in harmony and diversity. Sadly, oppression, violence, and intimidation of minority religions, beliefs, and ethnic groups are daily occurrences in the world today. Women have major roles to play in countering ignorance and religious intolerance. Indonesia is a diverse nation, with more than 252 million peoples of nearly 300 distinct ethnic groups speaking 742 different languages and dialects. Their lives are influenced by six officially recognized religions (Islam, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Hindu, Buddha and Confucius) and myriad unrecognized ancestral beliefs (Sunda Wiwitan, Kejawen, Merapu, Patungtung, etc.). The Republic of Indonesia’s founding father, Soekarno, adopted a symbol to embrace this rich diversity: “Bhineka Tunggal Ika,” which means “Unity in

Diversity.” This is a core principle of living together for Indonesians: acknowledging, respecting, and appreciating diversity. If the spirit of diversity and pluralism in Indonesia dies as a result of growing intolerance, Indonesia’s cohesion as a nation would be threatened. The 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Indonesia affirms and celebrates the fact that women are working to ensure that the spirit of diversity and religious and cultural pluralism continues to thrive in Indonesia and around the world.

In Indonesia and elsewhere, Buddhist voices are often missing. Hence, the 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Indonesia is a venue for introducing the Buddhist wisdom teachings through a feminist lens to broaden the perspective of social justice movements and activists from Indonesia and abroad, particularly those who are working on issues on tolerance and intolerance. At the same time, the conference introduces the views of Indonesian activists and social justice movements to Buddhists attending the conference from all over the world. These crosscultural encounters will contribute to shaping the just world we would like to see and live in. The 14th Sakyadhita Conference in Yogyakarta provides a platform for social justice movements from diverse political, social, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds to meet, exchange ideas and experiences, and discover common ground so that they may collaborate in encouraging tolerance, diversity, and inter-religious understanding.

The 14th Sakyadhita Conference brings together over 1,000 participants, with 500 from abroad and 500 from Indonesia. Coming from widely different backgrounds, participants have the opportunity to engage in intercultural exchanges with Buddhist students, teachers, scholars, contemplatives, artists and social justice activists from around the world. We draw inspiration from the research, contemplative practice, social commitment, artistic creativity, cultural dynamism, and dedication of other participants. We learn about the wide variety of Buddhist philosophies and other religious traditions, gain insight into Buddhist history and Indonesian culture, and enrich our own experience by learning from the experience of others, young and old, from countries around the world. We believe that the conference reenforces our dedication to addressing issues of gender justice, religious fundamentalism, peace and conflict, social justice, economic justice, environmental justice, and climate justice.

We express a commitment to address injustice and discrimination in all its forms: violence against women; social injustice related to unequal opportunities based on gender, class, race, caste, sexual orientation, origin, religion, political persuasion, or belief; economic injustice related to unequal opportunities or access to work, income, and livelihood; cultural justice related to unequal opportunities to exercise one’s own way of life, culture, beliefs, and religious practice due to prejudice; ecological injustice related to environmental and ecological behaviors that exploit natural resources and pollute the environment. Sakyadhita creates an ideal space for discussing injustice, discrimination, and equal rights in the religious sphere. For example, it is valuable to address the movement for equal access to full ordination for women, the construction of religious identities, and the ways in which preserving and defending religious identities can manifest in both healthy and unhealthy ways.

We will explore Buddhist resources for peace building, conflict resolution, and reconciliation through ideas, activities, and sharing the experiences of women of diverse religious backgrounds in building peace and resolving conflicts. We will also investigate the role of fear in generating responses to situations of danger, injustice, and potential conflict, and the realities of everyday life. Specific attention will be given to understanding the fear of dying from the perspective of various religious traditions. Many instances of intolerance are based on the notion of creating pahala (the Bahasa Indonesia term for “eternal reward”) or phala (the Pali term for karmic consequences), which may be used to expand or defend one’s own religion. These efforts are based on the concept of achieving a desirable state after death. Hence, certain responses and incidents of intolerance or violence may be interpreted as being related to the fear of dying. The Sakyadhita conference is an opportunity to explore how understanding and overcoming fear, using Buddhist principles such as compassion, can help promote religious tolerance and serve as a basis for negotiating and preventing conflict.

Sakyadhita is deeply indebted to the many people who have offered their time, energy, and resources to make this extraordinary gathering possible. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the writers included here and our hardworking team of editorial assistants for helping compile this collection. We would like to especially express our gratitude to Bhikkhuni Adhimutta, Margaret Coberly, Mariani Dewi, Carol Stevens Gerstl, Megan Huynh, Pamela Kirby, Annie McGhee, Rebecca Paxton, Rosalie Plofchan, and to our outstanding translation teams from Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam, who will help bring this collection to audiences near and far.

A New Space for Peranakan Chinese Woman: Tjoa Hin Hoeij in the History of Buddhism in Late-Colonial Indonesia¹

Yulianti

Laypeople's participation was one of the defining characteristics of the modern Buddhism that developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the features of this was new roles for women.² However, most of the studies on the Buddhist revival in South and Southeast Asia have focused on prominent men.³ Interestingly, the case of colonial Indonesia shows promising evidence of the important involvement of women in the process. My initial research has indicated that women participated through literary works and involvement in managerial matters, belonging to and becoming decision makers in crucial organizations.

This paper introduces Tjoa Hin Hoeij, a Buddhist *peranakan*.⁴ Tjoa, a Chinese woman, was an outstanding prominent figure in propagating Buddhism at the time. Her maiden name was Kwee Yat Nio and her Buddhist name was Visakha. Tjoa Hin Hoeij was her married name.

Tjoa Hin Hoeij (1907–1990) was born to a literate family, the oldest daughter of Kwee Tek Hoay.⁵ She received her education at the local Tjong Hoa Hwe Koan (THHK) Middle School. After graduating, she continued her education at the Methodist Girls' School in Bogor, where she stayed on as a teacher. As a young girl, Tjoa Hin Hoeij was active in Chie Mey Hwee, an organization she established for young, single *peranakan* women who lived in Bogor.⁶ The organization's main goal was to provide education and promote the social position of women in society. Her concern for the emancipation of women coupled with the supportive circumstances in which she grew up, led her to become one of the key figures in the development of Buddhism in modern Indonesia. Viewed from a broad perspective, this study about her role in the development of modern Buddhism offers a new paradigm for the study of Buddhist history, which has typically focused on male figures.

In colonial Indonesia in the 1920s, it became more common for women to receive a formal education. The idea of women's emancipation seems to have been a driving force behind this development. One way to measure the progress of women is literacy and women's participation in written culture. As Elsbeth Locher-Scholten states, the overall literacy rate grew significantly in urban areas in the archipelago and was an achievement shared by elite women.⁷ In fact, according to Locher-Scholten, the rate of literacy among women exceeded that of men. Between 1920 and 1930 on Java, for example, women's literacy increased from 9 to 13 percent.⁸ In addition to progress in literacy, more women's organizations started to appear from 1928 onward.⁹

Among the Chinese population, the same phenomenon was evident. The 1930 census recorded that the Chinese population comprised two percent of the total population of colonial Indonesia, or 1,233,214 people.¹⁰ In Java, the Chinese community mostly populated cities such as Batavia, Mr. Cornelis, Bandoeng, Semarang, Jogjakarta, Soerabaja and Soerakarta.¹¹ In terms of education, various Chinese schools began to proliferate from the early 20th century onward. The Tjong Hoa Hwee Koan (THHK) was a movement that upheld Confucianism as the true religion of the Chinese, excluding other religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism. THHK established its first school in Batavia in 1901, one year after the formation of the organization.¹² According to Claudine Salmon, in the 1920s more *peranakan* Chinese women received formal education than ever before. The Volkstelling of 1930 recorded that in Java and Madura the percentage of literate women reached 27.9 percent.¹³

A related development was the fact that more *peranakan* women became active contributors to periodicals. Improved literacy and participation in public culture were also expressions of modernization. As Faye Yik-Wei Chan puts it, *peranakan* Chinese were getting better educational opportunities, more exposure to Western influences, had improved communications with the rest of the world, and so on.¹⁴ On the other hand, the position of *peranakan* Chinese women remained quite traditional. The involvement of women in literacy stirred debate between progressive and conservative members in the community regarding whether women should be allowed to participate in social and public spaces and to what extent.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the number of literate *peranakan* Chinese continued to increase. This is indicated by the growing number of women whose writings appeared in published periodicals. Many of them used pseudonyms to conceal their real identities as a precaution in order to avoid become the subject of gossip.¹⁶

Tjoa Hin Hoeij, the daughter of a prominent writer, was familiar with various literary works from all over the world. Her father encouraged her literary activities. For instance, he urged her to translate English stories and articles from such periodicals as *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Guardian* into Malay to be published in local newspapers such as *Sin Po* and other Sino-Malay newspapers.¹⁷

In September 1935, Tjoa Hin Hoeij established the magazine *Maandblad Istri* (Women's Monthly), which was published between 1935 and 1942. In this magazine, she exhorted her readers not to neglect Chinese standards of decorum in their haste to become Western or modern. Her intent seems to have been to ensure that traditional values not become lost in modern Chinese society. She seems to have believed that if that were to happen, Western-educated Chinese women would be devoid of any sense of propriety and bring shame to the Chinese community, despite their intelligence.

Maandblad Istri was published in Melayu Rendah. Tjoa Hin Hoeij's use of the Sino-Malay language as her medium of expression was in accord with her objective to reach *peranakan* Chinese women as well as Indonesians, particularly the urban middle class.¹⁸ In an interview with Faye Yik-wei Chan, Tjoa mentioned that the magazine was intended to impart greater knowledge and education to women. The magazine also featured a "Social Problems" section that discussed a broad range of social issues, such as women's emancipation, education, employment, marital relationships, declining morals among the younger generation, and so forth.¹⁹

Teaching Activities

In the early 20th century, among the Chinese living in colonial Indonesia there was a strong desire to revitalize Chinese religions, inspired by the Confucian reform movement in mainland China.²⁰ This materialized with the establishment in Java of the THHK, mentioned above. Tjoa Hin Hoeij's father, Kwee Tek Hoay, opposed the idea that Confucianism was the true religion of the Chinese and the belief that other religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism, should be rejected. Instead, Kwee Tek Hoay defined Chinese religion as consisting of three religious traditions: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. For him, Buddhism was an essential part of Chinese spirituality.

In the periodical *Moestika Dharma*, published between 1932 and 1942, Kwee Tek Hoay

included a series of writings on Chinese religion (*agama orang Tionghoa*). The periodical also indicates how serious he was about promoting Chinese spirituality. He used his journal as a platform to advocate spirituality, as is evident in the inclusion of a column called “News about Spiritual Movements (*Kabar Pergerakan Kebatinan*).”²¹ Hence, the magazine was strongly dedicated to stimulating interest in Chinese religion, particularly within the *peranakan* Chinese community.

Tjoa Hin Hoeij was one of the most active contributors to the magazine. In addition, she held the position of secretary in the publication company that published *Moestika Dharma*.²² Tjoa wrote a variety of articles about spirituality and religion. In one article, “Religion in the Household (*Agama Dalem Roemah Tangga*),” she quotes a line, without specifying the source, that seems to be the inspiration for her writing: “Charity begins at home.”²³ She stressed that religion had to be rekindled in the household. She criticized *peranakan* Chinese families who, in her opinion, paid little attention to religion. For example, she was particularly concerned that religion was ignored by the younger generation of *peranakan* Chinese. She claimed that this generation had neglected the practice of veneration of their ancestors’ ashes. She argued that religion must be reinvigorated, starting from the family or household level.²⁴

Tjoa Hin Hoeij also emphasized that women should educate their children with religious values (again, she referred to “Chinese religion”). It seemed to her that a mother was the most essential agent in producing a moral future generation and thus it was essential to not overlook the spiritual education of children.²⁵ She saw the potential for women to play an important role in this process and suggested that women needed to be intellectually productive. Her strong concern with women’s role in society was well-reflected in one of her writings for *Moestika Dharma*:

In every movement of any kind in this world, no good progress will be made if women are left aside, because nature has put *yin* and *yang* together. Therefore, where there are men, there should be women for balance. That is how things have been in the past. Women have taken important roles in politics, society, religion, and in the household....²⁶

At the same time, she published a number of articles on spirituality. In one article, she discussed the belief in reincarnation held by some religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism.²⁷ Unlike most *peranakan* Chinese women of her time who used pen names, Tjoa Hin Hoeij used her real name, indicating that she was not afraid to take responsibility for her writings.

Tjoa Hin Hoeij once delivered a lecture in Surabaya (Soerabaja) on the topic, “*Dari Mana Kita Dapetken Kita Poenja Roh?* (Where Do Our Souls Come From?)” She began by quoting lines from Sir Oliver Lodge’s book on *Modern Scientific Ideas*, which discusses the actors responsible for human behavior.²⁸ In 1933, she gave a lecture titled “*Agama zonder pandita*” (Religion without Priests), in which she questioned whether a religion could exist without a priest to act as an intermediary between human beings and God. She noted that among the world’s religions, Hinduism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism require a priest, whereas Buddhism and Islam do not have priests to intercede between human beings and God.²⁹

In 1934, Tjoa Hin Hoeij became more prominent when the *peranakan* Chinese community joined forces with the Theosophical Society and the Java Buddhist Association to receive a visiting Ceylonese Theravada Buddhist monk named Bhikkhu Narada in Batavia. As a well-educated woman with good English language skills, Tjoa Hin Hoeij became the monk’s first female interpreter. She

served as the interpreter whenever Bhikkhu Narada gave lectures on Buddhism at temples (*klenteng*), Theosophical Society lodges, and other venues. Before Bhikkhu Narada left Java, he gave her several books about Buddhism and encouraged her to translate them into Bahasa Indonesia. Later, she mentioned that her work as an interpreter time helped her to develop joyful effort (*viriyā*) to overcome the exhaustion she experienced in spreading the Dhamma.³⁰

Tjoa Hin Hoeij was the only *peranakan* Chinese woman to serve on the board of a Buddhist organization during her day. She held the position of secretary in the Java Buddhist Association's Batavia chapter, which was formed in the presence of Bhikkhu Narada.³¹ She also served as the chairperson of the Chinese Religion Association (Sam Kauw Hwee).

Tjoa Hin Hoeij was not only active as a writer and organizer of Buddhist activities. Her zeal to promote Buddhism was such that she could also be called a teacher. Her enthusiasm in promoting women's role in society made her an influential figure in the spread of Buddhism throughout Indonesia. In addition to the dynamism she brought to the process of popularizing Buddhism, she was also an outstanding representative of Buddhist modernity through her use of new methods to promote Buddhist activities. Buddhism became a new space for women to be socially and religiously engaged, and thereby became a vehicle for women's emancipation.

NOTES

¹ This is a preliminary draft. Please do not quote or cite without the author's permission.

² Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking, "A Buddhist Crossroads: Pioneer European Buddhists and Globalizing Asian Networks 1860-1960." *Contemporary Buddhism: An interdisciplinary Journal* 14(2013) 2.

³ Sri Lankans mostly populated their history of Buddhism with male figures, both monks and laymen. The Buddhist histories of Southeast Asia countries such as Burma, Malaysia, and Singapore is similar.

⁴ *Peranakan* are descendents of Chinese immigrants who settled in the Malay peninsula and Indonesian archipelago between the 15th to 17th centuries and became assimilated into the local population.

⁵ Myra Sidharta, ed., *100 tahun Kwee Tek Hoay: Dari Penjaja Tekstil Sampai ke Pendekar Pena* (100 Years of Kwee Tek Hoay: From Textile Merchant to Master Writer) (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1989).

⁶ Faye Yik-wei Chan, "Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij (1907– 1990): Peranakan Chinese Women Write in Later Colonial Indonesia," *Archipel* 42(1991) 24.

⁷ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), p. 19.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Some of the women's organizations that were formed in the 1930s included Perihatan Perhimpunan Istri Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Wives' Organizations), Isteri Sedar (The Conscious Women), and Isteri Indonesia (Indonesian Women). *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Volkstelling*, Deel VII(1930) 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹² Eng Die Ong, *Chineezzen in Nederlansch-Indie: Sociografie van een Indonesische Bevolkingsgroep* (Van Gorcum: GA Hak & HJ Prakke, 1943), p. 202. Following the establishment of the first school, THHK erected more schools in different regions, such as Malang, Soerabaja, and Tegal.

¹³ *Volkstelling*, Deel VII(1930) 107.

¹⁴ Faye Yik-Wei Chan, "Chinese Women's Emancipation as Reflected in Two *Peranakan* Journal (c. 1927-1942)." *Archipel* 49(1995) 45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁷ Interview with Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, conducted on November 23, 1989. Also see Faye Yik-wei Chan, "Mrs. Tjoa Hin Hoeij (1907-1990): Profile of an Enterprising *Peranakan* Chinese Woman writer in Late Colonial Indonesia," *Archipel* 42(1991) 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Charles Coppel, "Is Confucianism a Religion? A 1923 Debate in Java," *Archipel* 38(1989) 126.

²¹ *Moestika Dharma* 29(1934) 1110.

²² The publishing company Moestika Boekhandel was founded and run by Kwee Tek Hoay.

²³ *Sifat boediman haroes dimoelai dari dalam roemah*. Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Agama dalam roema tangga (Religion in the Family)," *Moestika Dharma* 6(1932) 216.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Dalem segala pergerakan apa sadja di ini doenia, tidak aken bisa mendjadi rame dan madjoe kapan kaoem prampoean tidak ambil bagian. Sebab natuur soeda moestiken adanya Im dan*

Yang, begitoe djadi dimana ada lelaki, haroes djoega terdapat orang prampoean boeat djadiimbangan. Begitoeelah dari djeman doeloe sekali, kaoem prampoean soeda mengambil kadoedoekan jan boekan ketjil; dalem politiek sociaal agama dan roemah tangga.... Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Perempoean Tionghoa dan Agama (Chinese Women and Religion)," Moestika Dharma 3(Juli 1932).

²⁷ Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "*Bangsa Timoer poenja anggepan tentang reincarnatie (Asian Perspectives on Reincarnation),*" *Moestika Dharma* 4(Juli 1932) 138.

²⁸ *Moestika Dharma* 11(December 1932) 308

²⁹ Tjoa Hin Hoeij, "Agama Zonder Pandita," *Moestika Dharma* 13(April 1933) 462.

³⁰ In the preface of a special edition of *Mengenang Ven. Narada Mahathera* (Ven. Narada Mahathera in Memory), she mentioned, "*Sebagai penerjemah wanita pertama sejak Y.A. Narada Mahathera pertama kali datang ke Indonesia dalam tahun 1934, saya telah mengalami dan memperoleh vihara untuk mengatasi kelelahan di dalam menyebarkan Dhamma* (As the first woman translator after the first arrival of Y. A. Narada Mahathera to Indonesia in 1934, I gained experience and got the *vihara* to relieve my tiredness in spreading the Buddadharm). She chaired the committee who hosted him.

³¹ *Moestika Dharma* 24(April 1934) 924.

Jinakumari: Indonesia's First Nun

Medya Silvita

The first woman to become a nun after Indonesia achieved its independence was Jinakumari (1913–1995).¹ Because there is no complete documentation about her life and work,² this paper attempts to gather information from those who knew her best,³ from her Dharma sisters,⁴ and from her first batch of students in Indonesia.⁵

Jinakumari: A Pioneering Figure

Jinakumari came from an ordinary Indonesian family. Unfortunately, no information about her early life is currently available. Supported by her family, Jinakumari decided to leave her husband and family to become a Buddhist renunciant. Although the reasons behind her decision are not clearly known, her actions after becoming a renunciant are important for Indonesia's Buddhism history.

Jinakumari⁶ acquired her name when her ordination teacher, Ashin Jinarakkhita⁷ ordained her as a *samaneri* according to the Theravāda tradition at Vimaladharmā Monastery in Bandung, West Java, in 1963.⁸ Jinakumari was the only woman ordained on that occasion. The other Sangha members ordained with her at that time constitute the core of the Maha Sangha Indonesia today.⁹

In 1966, Jinakumari and several other female *sangha* members were sent by Ashin Jinarakkhita to receive *bhiksuni* ordination at Po Lin Monastery in Hong Kong. It is notable that Jinakumari received full ordination in the Chinese Mahāyāna tradition. She inspired other women to become nuns, which made it possible to establish an organization of Indonesian Buddhist nuns, supported by the Indonesian *bhikṣu sangha*.

Jinakumari was famous for her sincere devotion to her teacher, Ashin Jinarakkhita. Due to Jinakumari's administrative skills, she was entrusted with many important tasks in the critical early stages of Buddhist revitalization in Indonesia. Jinakumari was charged with submitting all documents concerning the purchase of land and the construction and renovation of monasteries. In addition to offering food and prostrations to her teacher, undertaking such important activities and responsibilities on his behalf was Jinakumari's way of paying respect and expressing her gratitude to her teacher.¹⁰ Jinakumari's devotion to her teacher is still remembered as one of her most admirable qualities as Indonesia's first nun.

Ashin Jinarakkhita's support for women and the community of nuns was well known.¹¹ Not only did he establish an organization specifically for Indonesian Buddhist women, but he also established a *bhiksuni* organization in the Maha Sangha Indonesia with Jinakumari as chairwomen. His plans for developing the *bhiksuni sangha* became increasingly concrete. After taking her place as the senior nun in the organization, Jinakumari attracted many students, both from within Indonesia and abroad.¹²

Jinakumari mastered at least four other languages besides Indonesian, namely Dutch, English, Hokkien, and Cantonese. She was known to be very studious without forgetting her obligations to teach, observe the monastic discipline, and attend to other duties around the temple. She was skilled in making robesaking for monastics and was well known for advocating the importance of taking care of one's health.¹³

Jinakumari initially settled at Nagasena Monastery in Cipandawa Village, District Pacet. She later moved to Avalokitesvara Monastery in Pondok Cabe, Tangerang, after its inauguration on 1985. Serving Buddhists over a wide area,¹⁴ Jinakumari sometimes went alone to represent Ashin Jinarakhita or traveled with him to visit distant Buddhist communities.¹⁵

Jinakumari worked and studied everyday. She never asked whether an attendant or a female lay supporter (*dayika*) was available to help with her needs, such as food, washing clothes, mopping, or other mundane tasks. Every year during a certain period, she would go into seclusion to meditate intensively and transcribe important *sutras* to be used in introducing Buddhism to the people of Indonesia, after she finished her retreat. All these texts were written, one by one, in her own handwriting.¹⁶

Every morning after reading the *sutras*, Jinakumari took public transportation to the traditional market to buy groceries and other necessities for the monastery. Ignorant people would yell “baldy” at her and some would murmur, “Was that a man or a woman?” Comments like these were a typical occurrence. Later on, Jinakumari used an old car and refused to upgrade to a new one, even when one of her students offered to replace it. She reasoned, “I would feel ashamed to ride in a luxurious car when most of my students are still using public transportation.”

Jinakumari had harmonious relationships with a wide variety of people from many religious traditions and socioeconomic backgrounds, both within Indonesia and internationally. It is no wonder that when she died, many officials from the *sanghas* of different traditions came to pray and pay their last respects to her.

Jinakumari’s Legacy

One important aspect of the legacy that Jinakumari passed to her students was proper training in monastic discipline.¹⁷ She made great efforts to help her students understand this crucial element of the Buddhist heritage. She also taught them the importance of serving and educating the laity so that they would understand Buddhism correctly. In serving the lay community, Jinakumari always made it a priority to attend to their needs and requests. In addition to introducing them to methods in how to train correctly in concentration (by reading the *sutras*) and faith in the Buddhadharma (*saddha*), Jinakumari also guided her students, especially laywomen, to become acquainted with the teachings of the Buddha, using simple stories and methods such as cooking vegetarian meals. Different types of laypeople came to see her, and Jinakumari used skillful means and a variety of methods to interest them in the teachings. Using various simple methods, she taught them how to be a good person in hopes that they would later seek a deeper understanding of Buddhism. She did all this “for the benefit of the many” and for the development of Buddhism in Indonesia.¹⁸

After Jinakumari passed away, the development of the *bhiksuni* community in the Maha Sangha Indonesia faltered. Due to Jinakumari’s pioneering example, women who wished to become ordained as nuns emerged in Buddhist *sangha* communities outside the Maha Sangha Indonesia. In the Mahāyāna tradition, well-known nuns such as Bhiksuni Gunasasana appeared to inspire more and more women to follow the path of Dharma. Ayya Santini became a pioneer by receiving higher ordination in the Theravāda Buddhist community. In the Vajrayana Buddhist community, Sramanerika Gedun Drolma became well known for having supernormal powers.

Following Jinakumari’s aspiration, Bhiksuni Dharmagantha (Teng Leng), her main disciple,

began accepting students. Since then, little by little, the number of nuns in the Maha Sangha Indonesia has gradually increased. The difference between Jinakumari's era and the present is that today most new students interested in monastic life are young people. These young nuns are very energetic and have a variety of different abilities. Through Bhiksuni Dharmagantha's outstanding students, a genealogy of nuns has continued. Two significant examples are Bhiksuni Nyanashanti and Bhiksuni Nyanapundarika. Currently Bhiksuni Nyanapundarika serves as the chairperson of the Bhiksuni Sangha of Maha Sangha Indonesia, admirably perpetuating the inspiring legacy of Bhiksuni Jinakumari in contemporary Indonesia.

On January 2015, the 20th anniversary of Jinakumari's passing away, Nyanamaitri Maha Sthavira publicly acknowledged Bhikkhuni Jinakumari as one of his teachers. He made this announcement when he introduced the *bhiksuni* heritage of Indonesia and explained the history of a jet-black image of Guanyin (Avalokitesvara) that he had guarded for many years and eventually placed in Avalokitesvara Monastery. This image of Guanyin was the first object of veneration that Jinakumari used while reciting *sutras*. She kept the image from the time of her ordination to the moment of her death. This image is now placed on the main altar of Avalokitesvara Monastery, the same place where Jinakumari's ashes are kept, and has become an object of respect by Buddhists far and wide.

NOTES

¹ Bhiksu Dharmavimala Mahathera first introduced the figure of Jinakumari to me. He expressed his respect and admiration for her and said that he wished there were something written about her. Bhiksuni Jinakumari had the great merit to be instrumental in the development of Buddhism in Indonesia and played an especially important role in establishing a respected role for women in Indonesian Buddhism. This paper is a preliminary draft to bring her story to light and document the first nun in modern Indonesia. Hopefully this preliminary research can serve as a starting point for research about the history of other Buddhist nuns and can be enlightening and encouraging for the *bhiksuni sangha* throughout Indonesia.

² Even after fairly extensive research, the quantity of resources available to document Bhiksuni Jinakumari's life are very limited, the main reason being that, in 2002, all the photos and documentation that were being kept by her family, including her books, writings, and other belongings, were destroyed when her family home burned down in a fire that swept throughout their housing complex.

³ I was able to compile a genealogy (with names and photos) of the Dharma sisters and students of Bhiksuni Jinakumari with the kind assistance of Bhiksu Aryamaitri Maha Sthavira.

⁴ The names of the Dharma sisters of this early generation of Indonesian nuns are Bhiksuni Jinakumari (Wan Thong), Bhiksuni Jinavimala (Wan Cheng), Bhiksuni Jinaphala (Wan Sian), Bhiksuni Jinadasa (Wan Sun), Bhiksuni Jinamaitri (Wan Khing), Bhiksuni Jinaloka (Wan Hui), Bhiksuni Jinakaruna (Wan Sem), Bhiksuni Jinapadma (Wan Lian), and Bhiksuni Wan Yung. It is interesting to note that Bhiksuni Jinaloka, who came from Palembang, South Sumatra, left behind ear-shaped relics, both color and crystal clear, which appeared from both of her ears.

⁵ The names of Bhiksuni Jinakumari nun disciples in Indonesia are: Bhiksuni Dharmakumari (Teng In), Bhiksuni Dharmagantha (Teng Leng), Bhiksuni Dharmagiri (Teng Yan), Bhiksuni Dharmabodhi (Teng Sim), Bhiksuni Dharmarukkha (Teng Liu), and Samaneri Dharmanadi (Teng Coan).

⁶ The lay name of Bhiksuni Jinakumari is unknown. In Hokkien Chinese, Jinakumari's Dharma name is Wan Thong (in Mandarin, Yuan Thong). Outside Indonesia, she was better known by the name Wan Thong, rather than Jinakumari. She was also known as the disciple of Bhiksu Thi Chen (Ashin Jinarakkhita). Based on evidence from her last KTP, the identity card of Indonesian citizens, Bhiksuni Jinakumari was born in Medan (North Sumatra) in 1913 (no birthdate is given) and died in 1995 at the age of 83. The names of Bhiksuni Jinakumari's lineage masters are Bhiksu Yuen Chie, Bhiksu San He, Bhiksu Yen Cue, Bhiksu Thung Chan, Bhiksu Pen Cing, and Bhiksu Thi Cen (Ashin Jinarakhita).

⁷ Ashin Jinarakkhita, the first Indonesian to be ordained after the independence of Indonesia in 1945, received ordination in 1954. This was a significant milestone in the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia. The ordination took place just two years before Buddha Jayanti in 1956, which marked 2,500 years since the Buddha's birth. Bhiksu Ashin Jinarakhita received ordination from both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda lineages. When he was a novice, he was a disciple of Bhiksu Pen Ching of Kong Hoa Sie College, who belonged to the Mahāyāna tradition. When he became a monk, he was disciple of Mahasi Sayadaw, who belonged to the Theravāda tradition.

⁸ According to Juangari, in *Sowing Seeds of Dharma in the Archipelago* (Jakarta: Karaniya Publications, 1995, p. 155), two *samaneris* were ordained at this ceremony held on March 1, 1963. Further information about the other *samaneri* is currently unavailable.

⁹ This organization, previously known as Sacred Sangha Indonesia, was founded with the following members: Bhikkhu Jinarakkhita, Venerable Jinaputta, Bhikkhu Jinapiya, and Samanera Jinananda. The name of the association was later changed to the Maha Sangha Indonesia, with the following founding members: Bhikkhu Jinarakkhita, Bhikkhu Jinapiya, Samanera Jinarathana, Samanera Jinakumar, and Samaneri Jinakumari.

¹⁰ When Bhiksuni Jinakumari met or was called by Bhiksu Jinarakkhita, she needed to walk approximately 1 km from her monastic residence to his monastic residence. Sometimes Bhiksuni Jinakumari needed to make this trek several times a day, but she never complained.

¹¹ Women's contributions to the development of Buddhism in Indonesia are not limited to nuns, but also came from a number of prominent Buddhist lay devotees who helped Buddhism to survive in all corners of the archipelago, especially those inspired by Ashin Jinarakkhita. Among the women who became nationally famous in this regard were Suktadharmi, who was a teacher and *pandita* (respected elder) in Jakarta; Prajnaparamita, who composed many Buddhist songs and was also a *pandita* in Jakarta; Sujata in Bandung, who supported Ashin Jinarakkhita to establish a youth organization and helped arrange national gatherings of youth from all provinces of Indonesia; Visakha Gunadharmā, an intellectual and Buddhist social activist in Jakarta; and

many others with a variety of abilities. Parvati from Surakarta-Solo, an outstanding, very humble *dayika* of Ashin Jinarakkhita, actively represents Buddhism in Indonesia even today. The struggles of these women came purely from their hearts. Using whatever abilities and knowledge they had of the local context, they pursued a vision for the future, or at least one that was useful for the next generation. The opportunities and struggles they experienced generated a spirit of togetherness, in a close brotherhood and sisterhood that they inherited from Ashin Jinarakkhita.

¹² When China experienced a “religious crisis” after decades of persecution of monastics there, one way of conducting ordinations for monks and nuns was to look for senior ordination masters (those who have completed many *vassa*, or rainy season retreats) from outside China. At that time, one of the available nuns who held a senior position in the *bhikkhuni sangha* was Jinakumari, who lived in Indonesia, so a number of nuns in China become her disciples. Unfortunately, the stories of these disciples and their Dharma heirs have not been sufficiently documented, yet it is still possible to find Bhikkhuni Jinakumari’s Dharma descendants in Indonesia.

¹³ If, even in the midst of practicing concentration, Jinakumari heard one of her students playing the ritual instruments incorrectly, she would knock loudly on the door or shout out in such a way that her students who were practicing would understand that they had made a mistake and should correct it. One of the students who received disciplinary training from Jinakumari was Nyanamaitri Maha Sthavira, who is now one of the senior monks of Indonesia. His Buddhist monastic education began when he was a novice and Ashin Jinarakkhita sent him to study under Jinakumari. Jinakumari was also known for her expertise in monastic discipline and was a respected resource for lay followers who sought her guidance on how to help provide the requisites for monastics. In preparation for the Kathina celebration, she advised laity about how to sew monastic robes as offerings. If laypeople offered unsewn fabric, she sewed it herself, so that all her students could have a new set of robes. Jinakumari was well known for never being ill, so if asked, she often shared tips about how to stay healthy. She was a skilled cook and taught laypeople how to make nutritious and delicious vegetarian meals, to encourage them to eat vegetarian food. She helped them to understand that not eating meat does not mean one is poor or will not have energy.

¹⁴ Among the cities that Bhiksuni Jinakumari visited and taught were Cianjur, Sukabumi, Bandung, Garut, Jakarta, Bogor, Cirebon, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Purworejo, Surabaya, Jambi, Palembang, Makassar, and Manado.

¹⁵ Every two weeks, Bhiksuni Jinakumari routinely visited the area entrusted to her supervision without being reminded and without asking anyone from these areas to pick her up.

¹⁶ Jinakumari wrote *sutras* out by hand, transliterating Chinese into Latin letters, so that her students could read them. Her message to her students who could not read the *sutras* in Chinese characters was: “If you train yourself diligently enough, one day you will understand the meaning of the *sutras*. Always be diligent! Always be vibrant!”

¹⁷ Jinakumari's remarkable discipline included reading *sutras* devotedly, without missing a single day. She began this practice from the time she became ordained and continued it until she lay in the hospital and took her last breath. Jinakumari was very firm in her commitment to celibate monastic life. She greatly appreciated being born as a human being and having had the opportunity to meet and practice the Dharma, following in the footsteps of the Buddha.

¹⁸ Laypeople receive many blessings and solutions to the problems of daily life from *bhiksunis*, including such things as devotional services (*puja bhakti*) and advice on worldly issues such as moving house, getting married, good fortune for the new year, or opening a new business. I was amazed to find Jinakumari's handwritten calendar and notes showing her familiarity with constellations, the cycles of nature, and their influences on human activities. These notes were written more than 20 years after her death. However, Jinakumari did not intimate even the slightest hint of these calculations to her students. At that time, such an understanding of astrological science may be the "first hook" that attracted laypeople who had no knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. This was one way she showed concern for people; she hoped they would have a better life and also have the opportunity to learn the Buddhadharma in this lifetime.

Parwati Soepangat: A Buddhist Srikandi¹ from Solo

Heru Suherman Lim

What image comes to mind when you hear the name Parwati? Perhaps fans of Mahadewa, a recent popular TV series, would associate Parwati with the famous goddess in Hindu mythology who is the daughter of a Himalayan king, the wife of Mahadewa Siwa, and the mother of Ganesha. In Sanskrit, Parwati means “the well from mountain.” She is pictured holding a lotus.

In this article, however, I will not discuss the goddess Parwati of Hindu mythology, but a Buddhist hero named Parwati who was born in Indonesia, in the palace of the Sultan of Solo (*keraton sala*), on May 1 1932. Her father, the late Kanjeng Raden Tumenggung Widyonagoro, was an official (*bupati*) in the palace and her mother, the late Raden Ajeng Soewiyah, was a teacher in the palace school (*Sekolah Keraton*). Because her mother came from the royal family of the palace of Solo, her life is bound up with the story and title of her mother. Although she was born into a royal family, this did not create a distance between her and her friends. Her warmth radiated in her gentle smile and her habit of always greeting others first when she met them.

Parwati was born into a Buddhist family and has been a vegetarian since she was small. She still remembers how she was trained and educated in the noble Javanese traditions of days gone by, such as wearing a *kain kebaya*² upon entering the sultan’s palace (*keraton*) and fasting on Mondays and Thursdays. Traditions such as eating only white rice (*mutih*), eating only fruit (*nyerowot*), and so on were practiced to learn to control one’s needs. Once a month, accompanied by nursemaid (*mbok emban*), she slept under a *sawo* (sapodilla) tree. This was to train her to accept unpleasantness and to develop a bond with nature.

From her childhood, Parwati developed an avid interest in reading under the influence of her mother, a keen reader. Through reading the writings of Ibu Kartini,³ her mother realized the importance of educating and developing herself. She supported women’s emancipation and wanted her daughter to receive higher education. She wanted her daughter to study abroad and become better and more highly educated than she was. When she sought information about how she could send her daughter to study abroad, her friends insulted her by saying, “That’s easy. Just marry Parwati to a man from the State Department.” Her mother firmly refused and said in Dutch, “No, my daughter will go overseas as an unmarried woman (“a Miss”).” The power of her mother’s prayer was so strong that in 1958, after passing all her examinations at Gajah Mada University, Parwati left for the United States, unmarried, to undertake a Master’s degree.

Parwati was also involved in the Theosophical Society. This is how she met her husband, Dr. Soepangat Soemarto, a professor from the Institute of Technology at Bandung (*Institut Teknologi Bandung*) and the Dean of the Faculty of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Technology at Trisakti University in Jakarta. Her interest in Theosophy also led to her meeting with Tee Boan Ann, who later became Bhiksu Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923–2002), the first Indonesian to become ordained as a monk since the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom and the leading pioneer in the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia. These three progressive thinkers all shared certain values and principles, such as vegetarianism, harmonious living, and simplicity. Parwati has since said that whenever the season for the Vesak celebration approaches, she always remembers her teacher, the late Ashin Jinarakkhita, because he initiated the first Vesak ceremony in modern Indonesian history. This celebration of the Buddha’s enlightenment, first held at Borobudur in 1953, marked the

beginning of the revival of Buddhism in Indonesia after a period of inactivity that lasted more than 500 years.

“The Buddhist Srikandi from Solo,”⁴ the title given to Parwati by Bhiksu Ashin Jinarakkhita, is suitable for her. Maha Upasaka Pandita Phoa Krisnaputra corroborated this by saying that Parwati is a simple and honest friend. Even though she is small in stature, she has tremendous determination, greater than many men. She is also extremely intelligent and fond of dancing. She has a strong social presence and dares to face challenges in order to defend what she believes is right.

In addition to being a great lay scholar (*maha upasaka pandita*), Parwati is always active in assisting monastics with their duties and responsibilities. She believes that a *pandita* can do whatever a monk or nun can do. Monks and nuns stay in temples and live celibate lives, whereas, in Indonesian society, a *pandita* is generally a householder. Parwati recognizes the important role that these householders play, noting that,

In Buddhayana, we have more than 500 Buddhist temples, but we only have about 100 monks and nuns. This is certainly not enough to serve the Buddhist community. Therefore, *panditas* can assist or even take the place of monastics in performing certain duties, such as officiating at wedding ceremonies, funeral services, and so on.

Parwati is very conscientious in conducting her daily Dharma practices, mindful of her body, speech, and action. She usually dresses in Javanese fashion, wearing the traditional *kebaya*, and she likes to take public transportation. She thinks that Indonesians need to become enlightened about androgyny, meaning they need to be aware of the role of hormones. All human beings have both masculine and feminine characteristics; therefore, men and women should have the same rights, including the right to be respected in the workforce, in politics, and in theology.

Gender equality and women’s emancipation have always been central themes of Parwati’s writing and seminars. She served as the first president of Wanita Buddhis Indonesia (WBI). She firmly believes that equality is a hallmark of the Buddhist teachings, beginning from the time of the Buddha. The Buddha himself agreed to the emancipation of women. The *bhiksuni* ordination of Mahaprapajati Gautami, the Buddha’s foster mother, and 500 royal women are evidence of this. Before the Buddha taught the Dharma, women were seen as beneath men and viewed as unworthy. People were very pleased when boys were born, but felt sad and ashamed when girls were born. In a well-known story from the time of the Buddha, King Pasenadi was upset and disappointed when Queen Mallika gave birth to a baby girl, but the Buddha comforted her, saying that a girl might become more noble than a boy:

A woman child, O lord of men, may prove
Even better offspring than a male
For she may grow up wise and virtuous
Her husband's mother reverencing, true wife
The boy that she might bear may do great deeds
And rule great realms, yea, such a son
Of noble wife becomes his country’s guide.⁵

Although this passage reflects values from ancient Indian culture that may be different from today, the Buddha is respected for pioneering the idea of women's emancipation, in addition to social reform and democracy.

The psychology doctorate holder from Universitas Padjajaran⁶ who likes dancing explains that she was taught *bedhaya* (ritual dance)⁷ when she lived in the Keraton. At that time, she did not understand the meaning and philosophy behind the dance's characteristic hand and leg movements.

Later, after studying Buddhism, I began to understand that the movements are all teachings on self-control. The eyes must always look at the top of the nose. We must not let our mind get distracted here and there, but must always remain alert in a meditative pose. We must be fully aware of each hand movement. These movements are actually *mudras* taught by the Buddha. We learned the Dharma wheel gesture (*dhammacakra mudra*), the fearless gesture (*abhaya mudra*), and many others.... I used to perform Javanese dance when I was a college student at Katholieke Universiteit in Leuven, Belgium, and the audience was so welcoming and enthusiastic. But sadly, the welcome is not the same in the motherland.

Parwati's nursemaid taught her a ballad, which she always sang before she slept and still remembers today. The ballad of Penjaga Malam⁸ is as follows:

There is a verse that keeps the night
Beautiful, keeps illness away,
Keeps disaster and pain away.
The genies and ghosts do not like it,
Evil beings do not dare,
So bad deeds and spells are dispelled.
Neither fire nor water nor
Distant thieves dare to harm one.
All bad spells and dangers will cease.⁹

Parwati believes that women should progress in dignity and in all respects, especially their consciousness. Emancipation is not only physical, but also mental and spiritual. Human beings are composed of five aggregates: body, feelings, discriminations, mental formations, and consciousness. Physical existence is not enough; we must also develop our consciousness. A woman's worth is not merely her capacity to shop for food, clothes, and other material needs. Women are capable of learning and practicing the Dharma, and have the potential to become masters. They can choose any teacher, but should avoid becoming fanatical. No one teaching or tradition should be placed above the others as the highest, greatest, or most correct. When we become masters, we no longer hold such views, because the goal of all paths is to reach perfect awareness. This is Ibu Parwati's message to all Buddhist women in Indonesia.

NOTES

¹ Srikandi means "brave woman" or "heroine."

² A traditional blouse and skirt combination that originates in Indonesia and is considered the national dress.

³ Raden Ajeng Kartini was born on April 21, 1879, in Jepara. She was a leading feminist, advocating for the emancipation of women in Indonesia. Ibu Kartini was very concerned about education in Indonesia, especially for women. Because of her concern, she founded a school in Indonesia that was only for women.

⁴ Srikandi (Sanskrit: Shikhandi) is a classic figure in the *Mahabharata*, the famous Sanskrit epic of ancient India, which is also popular in Indonesia.

⁵ *Anguttara Nikāya* I, 85. Quoted in Elizabeth J. Harris, “The Female in Buddhism,” *Buddhist Women across Cultures*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), p. 55.

⁶ She completed her doctorate in 1986.

⁷ *Bedhaya* (also transliterated as *bedoyo* and *bedaya*) is a ritual Javanese dance performed in the palace in Yogyakarta and Surakarta.

⁸ *Penjaga malam* means “keeps the night.”

⁹ Ana Kidung rumeksa ing wengi
Teguh ayu luputo ing lara
Luputa bilahi kabeh
Djin setan daban purin
Panaluan tau ana wani
Miwaba panggawe ala gunane wong luput
Geni atenahan tirta
Maling adok tan ana wani ing kami
Guno duduk pan sirna.

The Role of Indonesian Women in Buddhism Education

Zong Kai Shi

The Buddhadharma grew and developed rapidly in Indonesia at the time of the ancient Srivijaya, Mataram, and Majapahit kingdoms, beginning from the third to fifth centuries. At the time of Srivijaya and Majapahit, the Buddhist teachings of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions were widespread. Evidence of the flourishing of these teachings can still be seen in the present day. In almost every region of Java and Sumatra, Buddhist temples show the influence of the Buddhadharma at that time. One of the largest and the most renowned temples is Borobudur, located in the region of Magelang, Central Java.

Another site that is currently drawing the attention of archaeologists and cultural observers is Muara Jambi, near the present-day city of Jambi, in Sumatra. The site of Muara Jambi is believed to be the oldest and largest temple complex in the Indonesian archipelago, and its area is even greater than that of Borobudur. Based on the writings of Chinese pilgrims such as Yijing, a large Buddhist university associated with Nalanda University in India once stood at the site.¹

After the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom and the growth of Islamic kingdoms, little evidence of Buddhism could be detected. However, the Buddhist teachings were still evident in the traditions and way of life passed down from generation to generation in various regions, through what was known as “local culture.” Buddhism became recognized again in the 20th century through Chinese traditions, philosophy, and theosophical organizations.

Buddhist Demographics

The revival of Buddhism in Java was marked by the arrival of Bhikkhu Narada Thera from Sri Lanka (Ceylon) in March 1934² and followed by the ordination of Indonesian men as monks. From that time on, the number of Buddhists grew steadily. However, at the present time, the number of Buddhists has significantly declined. Statistical records show that the number of Buddhists in Indonesia in 2005 was 2,242,833, but the number declined to 1,703,254 in 2010. The majority of these Buddhists, as many as 317,257, were living in Jakarta. In terms of gender, 869,097 (51.03 percent) were men and 834,517 (48.97 percent) were women.

If we observe these phenomena closely, we notice several factors that may explain why the number of Buddhists in Indonesia continues to decline. First is the reluctance of teenagers to come to the *vihara*. The reason for this is that Buddhism may be considered boring, old-fashioned, and uncool. “Are you still a Buddhist?” is a common question heard by Buddhists of Chinese descent. Many people think that Buddhism is outdated and archaic. Buddhist parents often allow their children to make their own religious choices. There is a saying, “All religions are the same. All of them teach goodness.” This attitude of tolerance may stem from parents who think that the important thing is for their children to find a good partner, regardless of religion. Some parents believe it is fine for their children to change their religion if they want to. Many Buddhist parents send their children to schools that are religiously affiliated, which has resulted in quite a large percentage of young Buddhists converting to other religions. The previous generation of Buddhists focused on traditions and ceremonies and may have missed the essence of the Buddhist teachings. As a result, they are less capable to teach Buddhism to their children.

The Importance of Buddhist Education

The Buddha was an educator. He discovered and taught the Dharma in order to eliminate *dukkha*. After he presented his teachings, he asked his students to spread the teachings in different directions. The Buddha's instructions to his disciples can be found in the Mahavagga of the Vinaya Pitaka, First Khandaka, Chapter 11:

And the Blessed One said to the Bhikkhus: "I am delivered, O Bhikkhus, from all fetters, human and divine. You, O Bhikkhus, are also delivered from all fetters, human and divine. Go ye now, O Bhikkhus, and wander, for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, and for the welfare of gods and men, Let not two of you go the same way. Preach, O Bhikkhus, the doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious at the end. In the spirit and in the letter, proclaim a consummate, perfect, and pure life of holiness. There are beings whose mental eyes are covered by scarcely any dust, but if the doctrine is not preached to them, they cannot attain salvation. They will understand the doctrine. And I will go also, O Bhikkhus, to Uruvelā, to Senānigama, in order to preach the doctrine.

Education is a process of growing and developing throughout one's life. The Buddhadharma is an educational process. The Buddha taught a way to break free from the chains of suffering. If we carry through with the practice, we can become skilled in how to live our lives, by developing wisdom, compassion, and full attention.

Buddhist Education in Indonesia

Buddhism is recognized by the Indonesian government as one of six legitimate religions in the country and is included in the national education curriculum. The Buddhist education curriculum was compiled by the Ministry of Religion and is developed by each teacher. Religion classes, including Buddhism classes, are prepared for public schools and private schools. In a school that is based on a specific religion, all of the students are required to attend religion classes, taught in accordance with the religious affiliation of that school. In Indonesia, there are some Buddhist schools that have been established with the goal of providing education to children with an emphasis on Buddhist values for all students. In practice, there are two categories of Buddhist schools: Buddhist schools that provide only Buddhist education and Buddhist schools that provide religion classes according to the religious traditions of the students.

The first Buddhist school in Indonesia was Batavia English School, established in 1931. Unfortunately, this school was closed during the Japanese colonial era. The school was reopened as Sin Hwa English School in 1945. Under the guidance of the late Ong Tiang Biau, who was later ordained as Bhikkhu Jinarakkhita, this school was renamed Sariputra School in 1955. This school also has a monastery, located in a building that does not look like a temple, and this became the first Buddhist temple in Jakarta. Unfortunately, the school was officially closed on June 30, 2007. This historical building is gone now and the area is now used for business purposes.

Gradually, other Buddhist schools have grown up in various regions of Indonesia, the majority of them in Jakarta. Based on data collected from various sources, there are currently 37 Buddhist schools and 10 Buddhist institutes and universities (STAB) located in different areas:

Jakarta: 15 schools and 3 STABs

Banten: 7 schools and 2 universities (1 STAB, 1 college)

West Java: 5 schools

Central Java: 3 STABs

East Java: 1 school and 1 STAB

Kalimantan: 1 school

Sulawesi: 2 schools

Sumatra: 6 schools and 1 STAB

However, it appears that Buddhist schools have not provided the optimum benefit that they could. Buddhist schools have not yet become parents' first choice for their children. Parents tend to send their children to well-known Christian schools. In fact, no Buddhist school is ranked in the top tier of excellent schools that are the public's choice. In Jakarta, some Buddhist schools have been able to compete with other schools. Schools such as Tri Ratna, Narada, and Dharma Suci (which I lead) are ranked highly, based on the results of the National Examination. These three schools are ranked in the top 15 percent of all schools in Jakarta, but none has achieved a ranking in the top 5 percent yet. It is an extraordinary challenge for all Buddhist schools to continuously improve the quality of the education they provide in order for parents to feel confident in choosing Buddhist schools for the education of their children.

Women's Roles in Buddhism Education

In the course of history, we can find many women who have been active in the field of education. For example, Prajnaparamita has been actively teaching the Dharma in various regions from the time that she was young until now. She also created songs for teaching Buddhadharma that have helped students enjoy the beauty of learning Dharma. Another example is Parvati Supangat, a professor of psychology at the University of Padjadjaran in Bandung. She conducts research related to education and is often invited to be a speaker representing Buddhist educational leaders, among other national figures.

In my life, I have been very fortunate to be able to live together with extraordinary women who really care about education. From the time I was a child, I was raised by Athai and Apak in a monastery called Vihara Dharma Diepa on Jalan Tapanuli in Medan. Athai and Apak understood that I loved school and learning and they laid out the basics of discipline that enabled me to study. Every day at 4 am, they woke me up and accompanied me while I studied, doing their own reading or work. They continually provided support and encouragement for me to continue my education to a higher level.

In 1976, at the age of 16, I decided to become a nun. At that time, I was just graduating from secondary school in Medan. I then went to Taiwan, where I received monastic training and studied basic Buddhism at a special *sangha* college at Fo Guang Shan in Kaohsiung. Athai advised me that

no matter how far I went with my studies, afterwards I needed to go back and work in Indonesia, where I was born and grew up. So after I graduated, I returned to Indonesia right away. At that time, all I wanted to do was to establish a school, because I believed that education is very important for future generations. Learning Buddhadharma is not just about staying in the monastery; it also means growing and thriving in daily life in the wider community. By establishing a school, we wanted to provide an opportunity for children to get an education, learn Buddhadharma, and practice it in everyday life. Buddhism is integrally related to education. I believe that anyone who is close to education will be far from evil.

In 1984, with support from Athai, Apak, a female teacher named Nelly, and others, we began to establish Dharma Suci Foundation. Dharma Suci School began operations a year later, in 1985, starting with a kindergarten and elementary school. The following year, we opened a junior high school and later a senior high school. Dharma Suci currently has five divisions: an international preschool and kindergarden, a kindergarden, an elementary school, a junior high school, and a senior high school.

At present, Dharma Suci School has more female than male teachers; of about 80 teachers, 70 percent are female and 30 percent male. The school's female teachers play major roles in various fields. Four of the five principals are women. Perhaps women are natural educators. As mothers, women are the first teachers of their children. Women seem to instinctually provide security, protection, and education for children.

Dharma Suci into the Future

Dharma Suci still faces challenges. The school was initially established with the goal of providing opportunities for all children to get education. This is our motivation for keeping the tuition relatively low. Because the tuition is low, we must be thrifty with expenses such as salaries for teachers and staff, school facilities, student activity fees, and so on. As a result, we have quite a lot of trouble finding qualified teachers who are willing to accept the salaries we offer.

Dharma Suci continues to grow and the number of students increases from year to year. Initially, we had only a few dozen students, but now we have about 1,000, from preschool to high school. Our school is built on a very limited area of land, and we face many obstacles in our efforts to expand due to difficulty acquiring permits and costs. Since February of this year, we have had to limit the number of middle and high school students, because we cannot accommodate many students.

Despite the challenges and obstacles we face, we are quite proud of our school's achievements. The teachers at Dharma Suci are very loyal and dedicated to educating students. Everyone involved in the school feels a strong sense of kinship and togetherness. We always work together on a range of activities, so Dharma Suci is very visibly unified. Nearly Vihara Dharma Suci is part of our family. Many people there are attentive to our educational objectives and ready to assist when needed.

Currently, we are doing our best to improve our systems and services. We are looking for the best format for the Buddhist education of our students. We have outlined a new vision for Dharma Suci School, namely, to make it the leading Buddhist school in Indonesia. Our mission is to nurture happy, open-minded children. We want to help the younger generation to enjoy their education, love

learning, be knowledgeable and insightful, and have a good, caring heart. The Dharma Suci Foundation motto is “to develop high-concept, high-touch education.” In the process, we are aided by numerous women who are experts in their respective fields, including psychology, management, public speaking, and so on.

In retrospect, I believe Dharma Suci is evidence of the magnitude of women’s roles in education. Dharma Suci is evidence that women are able to take responsibility to step forward and direct Buddhist education toward a much better future. I would like to thank all of the people who have helped and support me, morally and materially, to develop in the Buddhadharma, especially through education. May the Buddhadharma always advance and flourish! May the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* always protect us!

NOTES

¹ A fuller explanation about Maura Jambi can be found at www.sudimuja.com.

² When Narada Maha Thera (1898–1983) visited Borobudur in 1934, he was the first Theravāda monk to visit Indonesia in over 450 years. Martin Ramstedt, *Hinduism in Modern Indonesia: a Minority Religion Between Local, National, and Global Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 49. A number of his books, such as *The Buddha and his Teachings* and *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, were translated in Bahasa Indonesia and were very influential.

Indonesian Women and Buddhist Social Service

Dian Pratiwi

The Indonesian Buddhist Women's Fellowship (WBI) is one of many autonomous groups affiliated with the Indonesian Buddhayana Council (MBI). Its activities are systematically organized according to a schema of five program areas: (1) Management and Organization; (2) Education and Communications; (3) Social Prosperity, including spirituality, health, and society; (4) Arts and Culture; and (5) Enterprises.¹ Each program area is organized and discussed thoughtfully to encourage and motivate WBI members, who live in 24 provinces (92, if we include the branches in remote areas). The main goal of WBI is to advance the welfare of Buddhist women, especially their ability to take initiative for the well-being of themselves, their families, and society, for the sake of all beings.

The Five Program Areas

The goal of the first program area, Management and Organization, is to upgrade the leaders' and members' organizational abilities. This entails organizing all available information in order for the organization to function well and develop for the benefit of society. An example of activities that have been undertaken is cooperation with Indonesian and international women's organizations such as Sakyadhita and KOWANI. In addition, the group maps WBI members, prints membership cards and organizational profiles, develops their website, and provides training in administration, secretarial skills, and organizational management. The program assesses the situation of Buddhist women by defining their needs. Once needs are identified, they create pilot projects in response. This includes preparing project proposals, fundraising activities, project coordination, and evaluation.

The third program area, Social Prosperity, includes spirituality, health, and society. Activities related to spirituality include pre-marital guidance and counseling, family retreats, a national program of baby and child blessings, and guidance for woman seeking ordination. Activities related to health include seminars about reproductive health, pre-natal care, healthy babies, and abortion. Activities related to society more broadly include loving visits to orphanages, hospitals, and senior care facilities.

Arts and Culture, the fourth program area, includes seminars about personal development, the production of Buddhist song books and CDs, and traditional dances. The fifth program area, Enterprises, includes activities such as producing batik uniforms and touring Buddhist sacred sites.

Each branch of WBI arranges its own activities according to the abilities and needs of its members. Each branch, including those in very remote areas, has undertaken a number of unique activities. In this paper, I will trace the three main types of activities that WBI has initiated: the blessing of babies and children, leadership training (LATPIM), and the collection of rice (*beras jimpitan*). These activities have encouraged Buddhist women to develop independently as women, mothers, leaders, and members of Indonesian society, and also as groups working in fellowship for the sake of all people and sentient beings. Through these three types of activities, the branches have gained many people's attention and the cooperation of large groups of women and their families.

Baby and Child Blessings: A National Program

The Indonesian Buddhist Women's Fellowship (WBI) selected baby and child blessings as one of their main national activities. The blessings give children a Buddhist "trademark" that enables them, at a young age, to become acquainted with the teachings of the Buddha. These blessings will hopefully be a positive influence on children and help them to cultivate their minds and develop spiritually.

The ceremony with children reciting the *sutras* with their parents and families under the guidance of a *sangha* member or members. The monk or nun then cuts some of the children's hair. Later, the monk or nun offers a blessing to all the children using holy water. In some places, the ceremony is arranged similarly to the event honoring the birth of the future Buddha. Seven handmade lotus flowers are placed on the floor and the children step on them, facing the monk or nun. This activity creates a very meaningful impression on the children and their parents' and families. After the blessing ceremony, WBI representatives present a certificate with the photo of the child's blessing to each child. Some monastics also prepare Dharma names for the children, which are stated on their certificates.

Any baby or child between the ages of one month and five years old can participate in a baby blessing. A child between the ages of five and twelve can participate in a child blessing. These activities have become very popular. All members of the children's families are welcome to participate, and they happily join in the activity. The baby and child blessing activity in Jakarta received an award from the Indonesian Museum of Records (MURI) in 2006 for conducting the blessings of the largest number of children. In this case, an amazing total of 365 children participated in one ceremony at Ekayana Graha Jakarta.

Leadership Training in Riau

WBI recognized a need for leadership training in order to equip Buddhist women to take greater initiative in the family and in society. Therefore, leadership training (LATPIM) is being provided to nurture women's development as mothers, wives, and leaders in society. A leadership training program was arranged by the Riau branch of WBI at the Dian Graha Hotel in Pekanbaru in October 2012. The program began with lessons in parenting conducted by Ibu Melly Kiong, a leading public figure in the parenting education movement in Indonesia. Mothers and prospective mothers were very impressed by this training. More than eighty individuals participated and were impressed by the quality of the training. They gained new knowledge about parenting and about the education of children. The participants upgraded their knowledge in a seminar about humanistic leadership, taught by Romo John Andrew, one of the leaders at the Riau branch of Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation. They also participated in a seminar on motivation and inspiration given by Romo Toni, one of the supervisors at MBI headquarters. These seminars motivated participants to become more self-confident in taking leadership roles within their family and society.

Further activities include breakout groups ("out-bond") outside the main hall, such as games in groups, that require more space. In this case, WBI members were trained by representatives from the Indonesian Buddhayana Youth Fellowship, Riau, in activities such as making clothes out of paper and some games using rope and straw, to nurture cooperation. These fun activities provided

a balance to the serious seminars in the main hall and helped create greater harmony among the participants, inspiring them to implement successful social services.

Collecting Rice (*Beras Jimpitan*) in Central Java

A special activity of Buddhist women in the districts of Pati and Jepara in Central Java is the collection of rice (Javanese: *beras jimpitan*).² Hundreds or even thousands of people collect rice from each family in the district daily. Then together, as a community, they donate the rice to establish a cooperative enterprise that helps people in remote areas of the country. This activity has been very effective, both financially and socially, in helping gain support for larger events.

Each family collects three spoonfuls of rice each day as they cook their rice at home. The community then collects and organizes all the rice into containers that are taken to the temple during prayer services. The collected rice is later sold, and the money received is donated to the cooperative enterprise established by the members of the temple. The idea of “*beras jimpitan*” is unique and very meaningful. The members of the temple do not feel that donating a small quantity of rice each day is difficult and participate in this activity happily, knowing that together their donations will help to relieve the sufferings of others.

Conclusion

The activities described here are just three examples of the types of social activities that Indonesian Buddhist women are currently engaged in. Other social activities of WBI members in various parts of Indonesia include organizing medical clinics on the occasion of the Wesak Celebration and Chinese New Year, setting up blood donation drives in public malls and temples, and providing free medical treatment for the poor and needy. Bazaars, Wesak fairs, and street markets (*pasar murah*) are held by WBI members in a number of places to give Buddhist women and the people in their surrounding communities access to cheap, good quality food items, kitchen devices, and so forth. Prison outreach projects have been organized by the North Sumatera chapter of WBI, and other chapters are developing new social service activities. A photograph of a game of tug-of-war organized by the WBI chapter in Bengkulu received an award for the best special angle at the National Photography Competition held by WBI in 2013.

We can find numerous ways to expand these activities. For example, a day before the blessings for children, we could organize effective gatherings incorporating talks by doctors to educate members, especially mothers, about general and children’s healthcare. Other activities that could be organized include training in vegetarian cooking, floral arrangement, handmade art, recycling, and so on. All these activities help create greater harmony and greater awareness among WBI members and their communities.

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¹ These program categories were developed by WBI in Jakarta in 2007.

² This information is based on interviews conducted by Ibu Susilowaty from Jepara.

Yuanwu Keqin's Chan Praxis: Teaching for Women

Fen-jin Wu

Much of Chinese Buddhist history developed within a patriarchal social framework, in which women were constrained in their practice, research, and propagation of Buddhism, and were therefore less likely to become Dharma heirs. Thus, there are fewer records of women than men in Buddhist literature. During the Song Dynasty, however, Buddhism was very popular and women increasingly participated in religious activities. This is reflected in the historical records of the period, which include more frequent mention of women studying and practicing Chan than in earlier Buddhist literature.

Miriam Levering's research on women teaching Chan during the Song and her observations about Linji Chan and gender, Tahui's teachings for women, and Ding-hwa E. Hsieh's studies about images of women in Song Chan are valuable contributions. However, there have been few studies on practice of Chan master Yuanwu Keqin (1063–1135) and his teachings for nuns and laywomen. This paper analyzes literary sources in an attempt to understand Yuanwu's three methods of instructing female disciples, the unique characteristics of his teachings for women, and the Chan practice of his female disciples during the Song.

Yuanwu's Chan Praxis

Yuanwu used three distinct teaching approaches when instructing disciples in their practice and study of Chan, depending on the character and potential of the student. The first approach was straightforward: to mediate on crucial *kong-an* (*koan*) phrases, such as “sucking up the water of the western river in a breath,” using no explanation or rationale. This method of instruction, ineffable and focused directly on the mind, was for the sharpest students. The second approach involved questioning students, exposing their ignorance, and then pointing out their weaknesses to help them make progress. The third approach involved providing beginners with commentaries and notes to explain the *kong-an* or Dharma teachings in detail. If the Chan master gave too much explanation and commentary, however, the *kong-an* would become dead words. The idea was that a real practitioner should investigate the *kong-an* directly, meditating on the living words, not dead words.¹

Yuanwu's Teaching for Women

Yuanwu's 14 female disciples are mentioned in texts such as the *Yuanwu Fokuo Chanshi Yulu*, *Wudeng Huiyuan*, and *Fokuo Keqin Chan Shi Xin Yao*. Most of these female disciples were women from families of high social status. Examples of these women are Senior Imperial Consort Jiāo, Senior Imperial Consort Wang, Princess Ta-chang, Madam Yi-gou, Madam Qing-gou, Madam Zhang Guo-tai, Madam Fang, Jue An Dao Ren Zu Shi, and Ling Ren Ben Ming. The last three became Yuanwu's Dharma heirs and Senior Imperial Consort Jiāo became the Dharma heir of Ta-hui (1089-1063). In addition, the *Fokuo Keqin Chan Shi Xin Yao* mentions three nuns who may have received teachings or Chan instructions from Yuanwu as they traveled to various monasteries. Yuanwu's methodology is illustrated through the three distinct teaching approaches he used with these female disciples.

The First Teaching Approach

Yuanwu used the first teaching approach to coach Bhiksuni Ruoxu Anzhu, Bhiksuni Zhao Daoren, and Madam Fang. The following section describes what we know about these women and how they learned from Yuanwu.

There is no record of Bhiksuni Ruoxu Anzhu in either Buddhist or historical literary sources, so her background is unknown. Both the *Yulu* and *Xin Yao* include the same information about Yuanwu's teaching of this nun, but only the *Xin Yao* gives the name Ruoxu Anzhu. However, we can assume that both records are referring to the same nun. First, Yuanwu gave Bhiksuni Ruoxu Anzhu a short Dharma talk about Buddha nature and the experience of enlightenment. Then, he cited the *kong-an* of Moshan Liaojan and Kuan-hsi Chih-Hsien for her. This is an encouraging story for female disciples because it presents a teaching about spiritual achievement in gender-equal terms. Female Chan masters who achieved advanced spiritual attainments could gain respect and authority from monks.² Yuanwu highlighted a crucial phrase of this *kong-an*: "I am not a deity or a ghost, so what should I change?"³ He instructed her to investigate this sentence and pointed out the direction of ultimate truth. This crucial phrase was used as a sharp tool for spurring her to a breakthrough enlightenment experience.

The next example is Bhikkhuni Zhao Dao Ren. There is also no record of her in either the Buddhist or historical literature. Yuanwu began his instructions to this nun by talking about the transmission of the Chan lineage and the concept of Buddha nature. Next, he cited the story of the dragon girl in the *Lotus Sutra* who achieved enlightenment in an instant as an example of a woman who achieved Buddhahood. He drew on this account to pose the question: "The dragon girl offered a pearl to the Buddha. Where is the pearl now?" He instructed her to investigate this question by focusing directly on the nature of the mind itself. Further, he cited a *kong-an* about Mazu Dayi and the layman Pang. Pang asked Master Ma "Is there anyone who is not accompanied by thousands of things related to Dharma? Who is it?" Ma said, "When you can suck up the water of the western river in a breath, then I will tell you."⁴ From the crucial phrases "Where is the pearl?" and "sucking up the water of the western river in a breath," we can see that Yuanwu guided Bhikkhuni Zhao Dao Ren in the direction of spontaneous understanding with no reliance on reasoned thinking or analysis.

Madam Fang was the Dharma heir of Yuanwu. A short biography of her is found in the *Wudeng Huiyuan*. Her husband was a county magistrate in the region of Sichuan. Later, she became a widow. When Yuanwu moved to Sichuan, Madam Fang studied with him at Zhaojue Monastery. Yuanwu instructed her to investigate the *kong-an*, "It is not mind. It is not Buddha. It is not a thing. What is it?" She worked on this *kong-an* for a long time, but could not find an entry point, so she asked for some expedient method. Yuanwu told her to just mediate on the *kong-an* "What is it?" directly. She responded, "That accounts for it. It's so close."⁵ Later on, her son went to Huangmei to serve as a local officer and she went with him. Later, she visited Wuzu Fayan and he recognized her.⁶ Wuzu Fayan asked her, "Śākyamuni and Maitreya are still his slaves. Who is he?" Madam Fang laughed and said, "Neither the young nor the old Wuzu understands that he has been right over there from the beginning." Then she turned back and left. Wuzu recognized her understanding of the ultimate truth. On several occasions, Yuanwu gave monks the same crucial *kong-an* that he used to instruct Madam Fang: "It is not mind. It is not Buddha. It is not a thing. What is it?" For example, it is recorded that he presented this *kong-an* while giving Dharma talks, teachings, and in private

interviews with monks.⁷ This example shows that Yuanwu taught without gender discrimination. The *bhikṣu* master Tahui also used this *kong-an* to teach his female disciple Miao-tao and it helped her to achieve enlightenment. Miao-tao became a great female Chan master in the Song Dynasty.⁸

The Second Teaching Approach

In private interviews, Yuanwu instructed Madam Yi-gou and Madam Zhang Guo-tai to investigate *kong-an* by the second teaching approach. The following section briefly introduces these two women, then discusses their Chan practice and how Yuanwu coached them using this second teaching approach.

According to the *History of the Song Dynasty*, Madam Yi-gou's family name was Sun and her husband was a high-ranking officer.⁹ There are two records of private interviews that Madam Yi-gou had with Yuanwu in Yulu. In one interview, Yuanwu instructed her how to practice *kong-an* meticulously. He asked, "There is no method, so who knows how to practice meticulously?" He advised her to keep her mind in a very fine and careful condition – at the moment of investigating the *kong-an*, in particular. At that very moment, the mind must be fine and careful. Ultimately, practitioners must experience it for themselves.¹⁰

There is no historical record that mentions Madam Zhang Guo-tai, but the *Shan Nuren Chuan* mentions a certain Madam Zhang (1060-1120) whose family name was Huang and who passed away at the age of 59. Apparently this woman lived during the same period as Yuanwu (1063-1135). She was born in the family of a high-rank officer and her husband was also an officer. During her middle years, she practiced Chan Buddhism very studiously and enjoyed mediating all day long.¹¹ From the beginning, Yuanwu recognized her attainment. He then encouraged her to break through current circumstances by asking her a series of questions and giving prompts that pushed her to realize her Buddha nature. Although realization is inexpressible, Yuanwu employed physical gestures, such as raising a duster and striking the Chan platform, to guide her to realize it for herself.¹²

The Third Teaching Approach

The third teaching approach is illustrated with two examples: Senior Imperial Consort Jiāo and Princess Ta-chang. After briefly introducing these two figures, I will summarize the Dharma talks that Yuanwu gave to these members of the royal household.

Senior Imperial Consort Jiāo was the consort of Emperor Hui-tung. At an early age, she was selected to serve in the palace due to her remarkable talent. A pious believer in Buddhism, she visited a number of monasteries and was eventually permitted to cut off her hair.¹³ On one occasion, she sponsored meals for the residents of Huilin Chan Monastery. On another occasion, during a Dharma talk, the Chan master Cishou Huaishen mentioned that Consort Jiāo promoted Buddhism at the palace.¹⁴ After the Northern Song Dynasty was destroyed, she received the tonsure and took the monastic name Zhenru. During the Southern Song Dynasty, she studied with Tahui in the region of Fujian.¹⁵ The *Xu Chuan Denglu* lists her as the Dharma heir of Tahui.¹⁶ There are four mentions of her in the *Yulu*; three of them mention that Yuanwu gave sermons and one mentions a Dharma talk. The first sermon was about the concept of Buddha nature, which is neither born nor dies, but is everywhere and perpetually peaceful.¹⁷ The second sermon was for the benefit of a sick monk

named Fazhen. The record states that Consort Jiāo requested Yuanwu to speak about illness for this monk's sake. Yuanwu cited the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* to explain that all sentient beings inevitably experience illness. He also explained that a *bodhisatta* may manifest illness in order to benefit people who suffer from illness.¹⁸ The third sermon discussed the meaning and merit of sponsoring Dharma gatherings.¹⁹ In the Dharma talk, Yuanwu addressed the concept of Buddha nature. He explained that all sentient beings originally have Buddha nature, but that the clarity of this Buddha nature becomes obscured by grasping and discrimination.²⁰

It appears that Yuanwu was well respected and influential at court. For example, Princess Ta-Chang invited him to give Dharma talk and it is recorded that Yuanwu gave a blessing to ensure the longevity of Emperor Renzong. Then, using a metaphor, he taught that the emperor takes care of all his citizens, no matter whether he knows them or not, and never abandons any of them. Like the Buddha and all great Dharma masters, he used whatever teaching methods were expedient to help sentient beings reach enlightenment and realize their Buddha nature.²¹

Conclusion

Yuanwu applied three teaching approaches to instruct his female disciples, according to their capacities and backgrounds. He gave nun Ruo-xu An-zhu the *kong-an* of Moshan Liaojan as an example to encourage her. With this *kong-an*, he demonstrated that gender is irrelevant to the attainment enlightenment and that perfect wisdom transcends distinctions of gender. Further, he used the story of the dragon girl to demonstrate sudden enlightenment and to teach that all sentient beings can attain Buddhahood. By using an example of a girl who achieved Buddhahood, he made the point that all beings have Buddha nature.²² Moreover, he simplified the *kong-an* teaching style, instructing Madam Fang to simply investigate the question “What is it?” This teaching method served as the prototype for the development of Hua-tou Chan.

These female lay disciples supported Dharma gatherings, offered patronage to the *sangha*, and propagated Dharma at the palace. They overcame the gender constraints of patriarchal history and society in their determination to practice and study Chan Buddhism. Yuanwu instructed these women in their investigation of *kong-an* by means of three methods that depended solely on their talent, without gender discrimination. As a result, some of them achieved realization and became Dharma heirs. These remarkable women have written an important page in the history of Song Dynasty Chan.

NOTES

¹ *Yuanwu Fokuo Chanshi Yulu*, CBETA, T47, no. 1997, pp.773c21-774a17.

² Ding-hwa E. Hsieh, “Images of Women in Ch’an Buddhist Literature of Sung Period,” *Buddhism in the Sung*, ed. Peter N. Gregory and Daniel Aaron Getz (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), p. 153.

³ *Fokuo Keqin Chanshi Xinyao*, CBETA, X69, no. 1357, p p.464c20-465a12 // Z 2:25, p.361c3-d1 // R120, p.722a3-b1.

- ⁴ Ibid., p. 472a17-b20 // Z 2:25, p. 368d6-p. 369, a15 // R120, pp. 736b6-737, a1.
- ⁵ *Wudeng Huiyuan*, CBETA, X80, no. 1565, p. 412a11-15 // Z 2B:11, p. 385d9-13 // R138, p. 770b9-13.
- ⁶ *Dahui Pujue Chanshi Pushuo* CBETA, M059, no. 1540, p. 878b5-17, p. 818a7-b8.
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The Rearranged Roles of Buddhist Nuns in the Modern Korean Sangha: A Case Study of Practicing Compassion

Hyo Seok Sunim

All human beings have their own roles, some of which are given by nature, while others we chose ourselves. The roles given by nature cannot be avoided, but the ones that we choose can be accepted or changed. The roles we have as Buddhist monks and nuns are roles we choose ourselves, based on our own decisions. We can play the roles according to the tradition or we can rearrange these roles in response to modernity. Today, the roles of Buddhist monks and nuns are being arranged by the times and the environment of the 21st century. In this article, I will discuss the rearranged roles of monks and nuns in modern Korean *sanghas* and share my own case of practicing compassion.

From the time Buddhism was officially adopted in 372 CE by King Sosurim of Goguryeo, one of the ancient Three Kingdoms of Korea, it was widely accepted on the Korean peninsula. During the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910 CE), however, Korean Buddhism entered a period of decline during which Confucianism was promoted and Buddhists were persecuted. Because of the government's policy, the status of Buddhist monks and nuns were of the lowest levels in society. Faced with this desperate situation, some monks and nuns went to temples located deep in the forest to focus on Seon meditation practice, while others engaged in petty business (making paper, shoes, and so on) to keep their temples in operation. Monks and nuns in the former group were called *yipanseung*, or monastics who study *sutras* and practice meditation, while the latter were known as *sapanseung*, or clerical monastics. This was a sort of division of labor. The words *yipanseung* and *sapanseung* indicate the desperate situation of Buddhist monks and nuns during the Joseon Dynasty. The word *sapanseung* was used during the Japanese colonial period (1910–1945) to mean *daecheoseung*, married Buddhist monks who have a wife and other family members, as a means of political exploitation by the rulers. This historic categorization has become a criterion that divides the monks and nuns into two groups.

Nowadays, however, Korean Buddhist clerics follow the tradition of Mahāyāna and do not stick to the categorization of *yipanseung* as celibate monastics and *sapanseung* as married priests. The creed of Mahāyāna Buddhism emphasizes *sanggubori hahwajungsaeng*, which means that a *bodhisattva* is “to seek enlightenment above and save sentient beings from suffering below.” Korean Buddhist clerics typically combine study and practice with service to society, using skillful means to lead living beings from the world of delusion to the world of bliss. *Sanggubori* and *hahwajungsaeng* are not seen as two separate roles.

Furthermore, in Mahāyāna Buddhism *bodhisattvas* should save others who are suffering, even if they themselves may still be suffering. This Mahāyāna teaching differs from the early Buddhist perspective. In early Buddhism, there is a metaphor of how a drowning person cannot rescue others who are drowning. This lesson can be interpreted to mean that passion or desire alone will not yield satisfactory results in spreading the teachings of Buddhism. People need to cultivate themselves before they spread the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha taught the path to enlightenment only after he had attained Buddhahood. In the beginning, the Buddha pondered whether or not to teach. It was the heavenly god Brahma who pleaded with the Buddha to teach the path to enlightenment to the first five *bhikkhus*. The instructions from early Buddhism give real power and flexibility to the disciples to disseminate the Buddhadharma far and wide. The demands of modern

society have changed the roles of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. Today, they must become jacks of all trades. They must practice to seek enlightenment and, at the same time, provide personal spiritual guidance to their followers in order to help enlighten them.

Nowadays, *bhikkhunī* temples in Korea are mostly located in urban areas, tasked with the essential duty of educating and spreading Buddhism; the involvement of nuns in managing urban temples is necessary and inevitable. No longer can it be asserted that meditation is the only way to follow the Buddha, because the modern environment for practice has changed drastically and the spiritual demands of laypeople continue to increase. After Buddhist monastics practice Seon (Zen) in meditation halls during the summer and winter retreats, they must come back to their own or other temples and take up the duties of effectively managing those temples. Seon practice helps cultivate compassion in the mind. After returning from their retreats, monastics have to put their compassion into action. This is why I say that *yipanseung* and *sapanseung* are two sides of one coin. We have to try to balance meditation and the practice of compassion. The two practices need to go side by side.

“What does life mean? What do I live for? What am I doing right here?” These were the questions that crossed my mind when I was 19. Back then, I was busy preparing for the university entrance exam. To find an answer to those questions, I decided to study Buddhism at Dongguk University. Once I started student life there, I began to visit the Dharma room on campus and pay respect to the Buddha every morning. In the beginning, after paying respect, the only thing that I did was look up at the Buddha statue. After repeated visits, I naturally discovered my own way of meditation – closing my eyes and focusing on breathing. The continued practice of meditation taught me to relax and feel comfortable. It also made it possible for me to focus on my mind. I knew that my mind was constantly on the go, which made me anxious and distressed all the time. In short, I grasped one of the Buddha’s central teachings: *anicca* (*jehaengmusang*), meaning that all phenomena are impermanent.

After I graduated from Dongguk University in Korea, I went to India to study. While I was in India, I used to visit and meditate at S. N. Goenka’s Vipassana Meditation Center. There I realized that my own meditation practice was the basic mediation method of *vipassana*. The practice allowed me to clearly understand that my breath, body, and mind are moving all the time. When I realized that the root of my problems was in my mind, I found the answers to my own questions. I became interested in how other people find their answers. For this reason, I chose to study cultural anthropology in India. With this knowledge, I found that cultural relativism in anthropology is very similar to the Buddha’s teachings. If we hold the view that only our own cultural values are correct and valid, it follows that we see other people’s cultural values as being incorrect or invalid. Through the study of Buddhism and cultural relativism in anthropology, I gained a better understanding of myself and of other people’s cultures and deepened my respect for their perspectives. This helped me develop a mind of compassion. Studying at Pune University and Delhi University offered me a chance to view the lives of other people, which gave me an understanding of their cultures, ways of living, and customs. There are no superior or inferior cultures in the world. Cultures simply differ with respect to their outer features.

All people share common ground with regard to being human, particularly when it comes to mental suffering.

Buddhism gave me insight, but I still had questions. I realized that I needed further enlightening. I wanted a relaxed life that allowed me at least one hour of meditation daily – a life not only meaningful to me, but also to others. I decided to renounce secular life and become a Buddhist nun. Renunciation allows one to meditate continuously and serve others in a beneficial way, with enlightenment as the goal. One nurtures a mind of compassion that promotes joy and empathy with the sadness of others. There are three kinds of donation (*dāna*): giving material things, Dharma, and fearlessness. Monastics and laypeople live in mutual dependence. In Buddhism, it is traditional for laypeople and monastics to help one another. Laypeople offer food and clothes to the monastics, and, in response, the monastics console laypeople who are in distress.

After I received my doctorate in cultural anthropology at Delhi University, I acquired a yoga teaching certificate at Kaivalyadham Yoga Institute. I came back to Korea in the spring of 2006 after ten years of study in India. Soon after, I renounced secular life and spent six months in the temple of my spiritual master. I vowed to observe the ten precepts as a Buddhist novice nun (*sāmaṇerī*). After I was ordained, I spent one year learning about the basic protocols and obligations of a novice nun. After this course, I advanced to the Sangha College of Bongryeongsa Temple, a four-year compulsory course of the Jogye Order, the largest Buddhist order in Korea. I studied more about the etiquette, duties, and canons of the Buddha and Buddhist sages. After four years of study ending in February 2012, I was ordained as a *bhikkhunī* in March of the same year.

After I became a *bhikkhunī*, I had to work as the manager of Kumryunsa, the temple of my spiritual master, for two years. My life changed drastically as I became a *sapanseung* instead of a *yipanseung*. I was used to meditating and studying Buddhism, but, as a *sapanseung*, I had the responsibilities of an accountant, treasurer, grocery shopper, and preparer of temple offerings. I am trying my utmost to run the temple in a stable manner. To my mind, a *yipanseung* needs to be generous and friendly, whereas a *sapanseung* should be meticulous and strict. These two types of Buddhist monastics have different missions. I used to be a reticent introvert, but my new position forcibly has changed me into a talkative extrovert – a disposition with which I am happy and pleased.

My schedule at Kumryunsa Temple is busy. In addition to keeping the temple running, I am committed to nurturing my capabilities and to playing a significant role in spreading the Buddha's teachings. In the midst of my hectic schedule, I managed to finish a two-year course in Buddhist chanting and completed a nursery school license through a cyber-university of the Jogye Order. In addition, I acquired a second-grade Buddhist recreation certificate and now serve as a Dharma teacher in charge of young Buddhists at Kumryunsa Temple. Busier-than-ever schedules bring new missions from other places, but I view them all as the joys of life because this indicates that I am someone others want to be with – someone who can help other people. I truly believe that the gist of the Buddha's teachings is to practice love and compassion in daily life. This is also the core principle of non-abiding charity (*mujusangbosi*), as described in the *Vajracchedikā Prajñānapāramitā Sūtra*. Offering fully, without asking or hesitation, is what the Buddha

meant by compassion and generosity.

These are the main reasons why I merrily accept various requests, including giving monthly Dharma talks at Jogyesa Temple for young Buddhists, monthly Dharma talks at Yongjusa Temple for men and women doing military service, and lectures on the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* at the Buddhist College of Jogyesa Temple. I see these requests as opportunities to practice compassion in my own way.

Throughout this busy schedule, I do not neglect my own meditation practice. I conduct four evening classes of meditation and yoga every week, largely attended by people in the neighborhood. My own need and desire for meditation, arising from my hectic schedule, is quenched through the classes I offer. People often ask me whether the evening classes are an additional burden for me, but meditation and yoga help me foster the mind of compassion by providing opportunities for reflection and retreat.

The Buddha once said that life is a sea of pain and his teachings serve the role of a raft to help people reach the other side of the sea. He added that when people arrive at the shore of *nirvana*, they need to boldly advance to their final destination, leaving the raft behind. I think that the role of monastics is similarly designed to convey people in distress to the state of *nirvāna*. To serve that function, monastics have to be very strong rafts by engaging in serious mediation. We might be a small, not particularly durable raft at the moment, but we should transform ourselves into a gigantic, durable raft on which hundreds of people can get aboard. This transformation can be achieved through ceaseless meditation, which may be an ultimate goal of Buddhist monastics and a way of practicing compassion.

Vipassana and Pain: A Case Study of Taiwanese Female Buddhists Who Practice Vipassana *Shiou-Ding Shi (Wang Hsiu-Fei)*

There has been little research on the religious practices of Taiwanese female Buddhists. Although these practitioners may not have full control of every aspect of their lives, they believe that their minds are free. They hope that, through Buddhism, they can be liberated by the Buddhist teachings in future lives. In contrast, according to the teachings on *vipassana* (insight) meditation, people can gain wisdom and attain *nibbāna* in this life. By practicing the Four Brahmaviharas (Divine Abidings), they can develop *metta* (loving kindness).

Motivation and Question

It is well known that giving birth is one of the most painful things women experience. However, women's love and affection for their babies are not lessened by the physical pain that accompanies childbirth. This shows that not only do women have the power to shoulder difficulties and hardships, but that they also have the capacity to respond to suffering with kindness and understanding. It seems that the ability to love and to be compassionate is natural for women, similar to the practice of *vipassana* and the Four Brahmaviharas. In this essay, I aim to explore how female Buddhist practitioners utilize their natural ability to cope with painful experiences, such as childbirth, while practicing *vipassana* and the Four Brahmaviharas.

In Taiwan, *vipassana* and meditation on the Four Brahmaviharas have gained popularity in recent decades and the number of female practitioners has grown considerably over the last ten years. However, only a few local studies have been conducted on the subject. This paper is about Taiwanese female Buddhists' experience of pain while practicing *vipassana* and the Four Brahmaviharas.

Research Methods in the Study

To address this issue, I conducted a study by interviewing female Buddhists who practice these two meditation methods. I followed a group of female practitioners whose ages range from forty to sixty years old. Some of these practitioners are married and some are single; some are monastics and some are lay Buddhists. Most of them have completed high school education and hold jobs. The study is based on a meditation course that consisted of nine days of *vipassana* meditation practice, followed by one day practicing the Four Brahmaviharas – loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upekkha*) – with an emphasis on compassion.

To analyze the data I collected, I used Robert Schweitzer's phenomenological method:

Stage 1. Intuitive/Holistic Understanding of the Raw Data

Stage 2. Forming a Constituent Profile

2.1 Natural Meaning Units (NMUs)

2.2 Central Themes

2.3 Constituent Profile

Stage 3. Forming a Thematic Index

- 3.1 Delineating Constituent Profiles
- 3.2 Extracting Referents
- 3.3 Thematic Index
- Stage 4. Searching the Thematic Index
- Stage 5. Arriving at an Extended Description
- Stage 6. Synthesis of Extended Descriptions¹

Data and Analysis

I interviewed a group of female Buddhist practitioners about their experience of pain during meditation. Descriptions of their experiences were recorded and analyzed. The following is a composite of the textual and structural descriptions of some of the similarities observed. These descriptions can be divided into four themes – the area of the pain, the duration of the pain, the characteristics of the pain, and the response to the pain – but the interviews of all respondents do not necessarily include all four themes. The important point is to distinguish similar patterns in the descriptions and try to understand their significance.

The purpose of my research is to gain insight into the true nature of pain during meditation. This study is based solely on my perceptions; other researchers' points of view may vary. For example, some practitioners may describe similar experiences as one event rather than multiple events. Ultimately, the best way to understand the phenomenon of pain during meditation is through personal experience.

The first theme is an analysis of the extent of the pain, which may range from small to large. In some cases, the region of the pain may expand or shrink in size. For some, the pain vibrates in all directions, while for others it moves in specific directions. The region of the pain may be patchy at first, then break down into several pain points. The size of the area of pain does not necessarily correlate with the severity of the pain.

The second theme is an analysis of the duration of the pain. The pain may be perceived as lasting for a long or short time. With practice, the duration of the pain may become shorter. In some cases, the pain is persistent, while in others it is intermittent. In one hour of meditation, the pain may occur during the last ten minutes of the session, but it may not occur in every meditation session. When practicing meditation on compassion, because the focus is not on the body, the pain may not be felt as acutely.

The third theme is an analysis of the characteristics of the pain. Painful sensations may be categorized as heat or cold, as either a tightening or a loosening, or as moving upward or downward. When the eyes are open, the pain may decrease. Sometimes the pain may disappear when the meditator changes posture or opens the eyes.

The fourth theme is an analysis of the response to pain. During a meditation course, one may feel that other practitioners are quiet, calm, and without pain, and that it is only oneself who is experiencing pain. Pain is generally experienced as a strong physical sensation, usually in the knees, legs, back, or shoulders. Each person responds to pain in a different way. When pain occurs, some meditators focus on the pain point (over a larger area, such as the knees), while others focus only on the sore point (over a smaller areas, such as a specific pain point in the knees), and ignore feelings in other parts of the body. Others quickly shift their attention to points where they do not feel pain

and then quickly come back to observe the pain point. Others shift their attention by observing the breathing. Some attempt to perceive that the pain point is just a small part of the body, not the main point of the body. Others automatically move their heads towards the pain point to observe it more closely. Some practice a mixture of all these different methods.

Meditators are instructed to regard pain simply as a physical phenomenon, to sit still, and to allow the physical phenomenon to occur, lest psychological resistance arise. They observe both physical and psychological phenomena, evaluating whether they can cope with such sensations and allowing feelings of acceptance and calm to happen. They may feel the pain decrease, followed by some time of no pain. Pain may be experienced as changing from a solid physical phenomenon into a liquid phenomenon, then into a feeling like air. Meditators often think that the pain is caused by incorrect posture but, after a period of meditation, may realize that sitting is not necessarily the cause of the pain. The pain comes and goes by itself. Different people feel pain of various intensities and at different stages; some experience sudden or unbearable pain. The severity of the pain is determined by the mind, not necessarily the physical sensation.

When meditators observe the variation of pain objectively or wholeheartedly, they may no longer feel pain or discomfort. They do not reject the pain and feel no resistance. Instead, they feel a softening of the pain, and it goes away. After meditation, some people may consult a doctor. When they tell the doctor about the uncomfortable sensations they experienced, the doctor may ask whether they have headaches, but they do not. When meditators focus on feeling the pain, the pain seems to dissipate.

After the meditation course, whether meditators perceive the experience to have been pleasant or unpleasant, they observe that they have developed the habit of observation. They generally spend more time observing situations before they react to them. They feel that they have more time to choose when and how to react, in a less hurried way. They generally feel that they can do things better than before and are happier.

Results

After a few days of practicing, the focus of the meditators' observations gradually shifts from an awareness of others' bodies back to their own body. They may compare themselves to others and feel inferior. When they focus their observations on their own body, they often find that their pain is related to posture. Pain is just one object of observation in the meditation process. Pain is as important as other objects of observation, but meditators do not need to focus only on pain.

When the meditator observes the relationship between the observer and the pain, it becomes clear that the observer and the pain do not have to be bound together. Gradually, meditators begin to observe the pain as if from a distance and develop the ability to observe the emergence of the pain, the area of the pain, its characteristics, and responses to the pain in greater detail. They begin to take note of changes in the duration of the pain, the area, and their responses. When they notice these changes, they learn to disassociate themselves from the pain.

As practitioners become familiar with the practice of meditation and experience this dissociation, they can usually distinguish physical and mental pain as two different types of phenomena. As practitioners meditate and focus their practice, the physical pain becomes more bearable and disappears sooner. In other words, when the meditator is able to completely dissociate

from the phenomenon of physical pain, the pain can be observed more clearly. They observe that what starts out as a solid sense of pain turns into waves of vibration. Some meditators can even observe the short period of time between the sensation of pain and its disappearance, as it vanishes like vapor.

Through these experiences, meditators become more willing to observe whatever phenomena arise during meditation with more equanimity. Rather than rush to physically escape the pain by shifting their posture or reacting emotionally, for example, and thereby generating a feeling of aversion, they are able to dissociate themselves from the pain. As they learn to dissociate, they no longer focus on the pain, but begin to freely and directly observe the changes in the pain.

After learning to dissociate themselves from the pain, meditators may experience a special relationship with pain. As they move from one experience to the next, they experience differences in the duration and the characteristics of pain, in their perceptions, and in their reactions. As a result of all these experiences, the physical pain becomes more fluid, then more like a vapor, until finally it disappears.

Through this process, meditators come to understand that they are not the pain, but that they just happen to meet pain in that particular space and time; therefore, they can observe it without attachment. It is difficult to control the time between the emergence of pain and its disappearance. When they temporarily experience a period of no pain, they observe that they are not experiencing pain until they again experience painful sensations once again. It is unwise to be attached to the pain because one will be unable to observe its dissolution.

Women gain new experience as they learn to observe how pain arises and goes away. This is different from what they have learned before – that they simply need to endure the pain. From the experience of faithful observation, they gain confidence that they will be able to observe pain carefully before responding. Unlike compassion toward children, which may be an intuitive response, meditation is a conscious process in which one practices compassion toward specific objects, followed by an all-encompassing compassion for no specific reason or object.

Conclusions

My preliminary findings are that, when the women first practice *vipassana*, they learn to perceive physical pain as a phenomenon and to see through it, rather than identifying with it. For example, they observe pain by focusing on one or several pain points. They perceive the pain points to be appearing, disappearing, and moving in different directions by themselves.

After the women practice *vipassana*, they practice the Four Brahmaviharas. Through this practice, they find that they become less emotional. They are able to perceive phenomena with *upekkha* (equanimity) and respond to everything with wisdom. When they face different situations, they are able to observe them calmly and know the appropriate responses. Ultimately, after engaging in these Buddhist practices, female practitioners develop the confidence to face difficult situations. Gradually, they find that they can achieve liberation not only in the next life, but also in this life.

NOTE

¹ Carl Holroyd, "Phenomenological Research Method, Design, and Procedure: A Phenomenological Investigation of the Phenomenon of Being-in-community Building Workshop," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 1:1(2001). Stage 1: Intuitive/Holistic Understanding of the Raw Data requires reading data, repeatedly if necessary, in order to achieve a holistic and intuitive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. All preconceptions and judgments be bracketed. Stage 2: Forming a Constituent Profile summarizes the raw data from each participant. Stage 3: Forming a Thematic Index uses profiles from each participant to construct a thematic index that highlights major themes that have emerged. Stage 4: Searching the Thematic Index enables the comparison of referents, central themes, and constituent profiles to form a set of interpretive themes. The focus is on explaining data that reports the meaning of experience. Stage 5: Arriving at an Extended Description uses themes to explain meanings attributed to the phenomena under investigation. Stage 6: Synthesis of Extended Descriptions summarizes the interpretive themes to produce an in-depth picture of participants' experience of the phenomena under investigation. P. Sherwood and A. Silver, "Client Experience of Counselling and Psychotherapy," Unpublished report, Edith Cowan University, Bunbury WA, 1999, pp. 10-13.

Buddhist and Living with HIV: Two Life Stories from Taiwan

Wei-yi Cheng

This paper presents the life stories of two Taiwanese Buddhist gay men who are HIV positive. The discussion will center on their life experience with HIV and how Buddhism might have influenced their lives. It might seem odd to present the life-stories of two men rather than women at a Sakyadhitha conference, a conference about Buddhist women, especially when a great number of those infected with HIV/AIDS worldwide are women.¹ In Taiwan, it is estimated that the ratio between men and women living with HIV/AIDS is approximately 12.92:1.² Because of the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS and Chinese traditional ideas about women's morality, Taiwanese women living with HIV/AIDS reportedly have fewer medical resources than their male counterparts.³ In light of this, how can I choose to tell the stories of two men rather than women? My reason is simple: I happened to know them. They were introduced to me through a friend who is also HIV positive. Having witnessed the discrimination that my friend suffered, the idea came to me to write about his experience. His story is not included in this paper, however. Our friendship made me somehow uncomfortable to write about him. Therefore, I chose the life stories of two other acquaintances for this conference.

My friend urged me to write about the stories of people living with HIV/AIDS when he realized that there is very little qualitative research on PLWHA in Chinese language academic sources. Most Chinese research is based on a quantitative research method, and he felt that his story was not being properly heard. HIV/AIDS still carries stigma in Taiwan.⁴ I only have to look at the discrimination my friend suffered to be aware of this. For example, during a period when he was not well, health officials visited him every day and would not leave until they saw him take his medication. A school nurse called him every day to check on him and, worst of all, warned other students to keep a distance from him. All of these experiences devastated him.

Most Chinese-language research on people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) focus on prevention and medication, but day-to-day life experiences are seldom discussed. Also seldom discussed is the religious aspect of PLWHA. There may be one or two papers on this subject, but they are about Christian men.⁵ This neglect is curious, because a large-scale survey of PLWHA in Taiwan reveals that psychosocial support is crucial for the well-being of PLWHA.⁶ Research in other countries also reveals that the religious aspect is important to the well-being of PLWHA and/or their caretakers.⁷ One study from Thailand even shows that Buddhist mediation helps to improve the quality of life of PLWHA.⁸ Cases of Buddhist *sangha* in Thailand caring for PLWHA might be well known in English-language academia,⁹ but is unknown in Taiwan. In fact, none of the three men I talked to had heard of them. This short paper is intended to fill that gap.

Interviews with the two men discussed in this paper were carried out in June 2014. My interview with the first man, whom I will call Gary, lasted for about two hours. I conducted two formal interviews with the second man, Leo, each lasting for two hours. I will briefly narrate their life-stories and discuss them.

Gary's Experience

Gary was 34 years old at the time of the interview. He has an M.A. degree and works as a software programmer. He comes from a typical working-class family in southern Taiwan. His family practices Chinese popular religion, and he did not know much about Buddhism as a child. He converted to Buddhism as an undergraduate student:

During my undergraduate years, I took courses in Thick Black Theory¹⁰ and Studies of Living and Dying. They initiated my interest in human nature In short, my experience with Buddhism began unconsciously. I didn't know why I began to read Buddhist *sutras* I don't want to describe my Buddhist journey as "learning Dharma," because it's more like "experiencing Dharma...." Eventually, I applied [Dharma] in attempts to understand my life.

Gary claims to have become aware of his homosexuality when he was as young as eleven. His coming out of the closet was an accident. One day in his freshman year, his mother searched his room and found his diary. After reading the diary, she realized that her son was gay. This did not go over well with his mother. Being the only son of the family, Gary was expected to get married, have a son, and pass on the family name, in accordance with traditional Chinese values.¹¹ The mother and son had many quarrels, and his mother constantly pressured Gary to marry. Oddly enough, Gary's father had little to say about his homosexuality and gave Gary very little pressure to marry.

Today, Gary is a well-known gay rights activist who participates in many protests and is very vocal in the movement for the legalization of same-sex marriage. He thinks that disclosing one's (homo)sexual identity is important:

Coming out of the closet is a statement. Psychologically, it is a self-recognition and [a step] to obtain new recognition from others. So I think "coming out of the closet" is important. But its importance does not lie in the change of one's true nature The transformation that might have appeared to be after coming out of the closet is merely a return to one's true self.

Although Gary does not seek to conceal his homosexual identity, he does not seek to disclose his homosexual identity to his co-workers. He simply assumes that his co-workers must have learned about his homosexuality from the media due to his involvement in the gay rights movement. However, he tries to conceal his health condition from his family and co-workers. One reason he gives is that he does not wish to cause his elderly parents anxiety:

I think that [whether or not to tell my parents about my illness] must depend on conditions [*paticca-samuppāda-anga*]. It will depend on what kind of conditions arise. Then I will react accordingly Yes, if I can, I will conceal it from my parents for the rest of my life. I will choose not to let them know. But if the condition arises, I will not resist [telling them] neither.

Because he and his parents live in different cities, it is not difficult to conceal his health condition from them.

As for the co-workers, he conceals that he is HIV positive from them out of concern for discrimination. He recalls an incident with an acquaintance:

Later he asked me if I am a HIV positive. “Yes,” I answered. “But you don’t look like someone who is HIV positive,” he said. “Do people write ‘I am HIV positive’ on their forehead?” [I replied.] “Shouldn’t people with HIV be lying on a bed dying?” he asked again.

This is [an example] of illusion, simply because someone has a preset idea about what PLWHA should be like People can easily be deceived by appearances. This is why this person just sat there and listened to me for a long time. I successfully dissolved some of his extreme views. But at the end, he said to me, “I still don’t want to be touched by people like you.”

Currently, Gary is a member of a Japanese Buddhist organization. He does not openly discuss his homosexuality in the community, but some of his Dharma brothers know about his sexuality and health condition. He claims that those who know do not treat him any differently.

Leo’s Experience

Leo is 31 years old, has a high school education, and works in telemarketing. Unlike Gary, who comes from a typical southern Taiwanese family, Leo comes from a broken family. His parents separated when he was a toddler, and he was raised primarily by his grandparents, now-deceased. He described his grandparents as devoted Buddhists who raised him in a Buddhist environment:

As early as I can remember, I chanted *sutras* and attended morning and evening *pujas* with my grandparents and aunt. At that time, Buddhism was a way of life for me. Later, I stopped [my Buddhist practice] because of family problems. But after dating a Buddhist boyfriend, I resumed my Buddhist practice again. Because [my aunt] later entered the *sangha*, I acquired more knowledge about Buddhism.

Even though he was close to his grandparents, they were conservative and strongly opposed to homosexuality. He never openly disclosed his homosexuality to his family, although he suspects that they must have suspected because he never had a girlfriend. Although his Buddhist nun aunt knows about his homosexuality, Leo believes that she does not approve of it. His aunt wishes him to enter the *sangha*, and Leo claims to still entertain the idea from time to time. Living with HIV is the main reason that he has not donned the robe.

Contrary to Gary, who believes being open about sexuality is important in being honest with oneself and others, Leo does not favor this idea. Leo believes that “coming out of the closet” might be too much for his family to bear, and he prefers to remain discrete about it:

At the first, I thought homosexuality was an illness. When I realized that I was gay [while in high school], for three or four years I could not stand myself. I accepted my homosexuality

only very slowly. My family strongly opposes homosexuality and I have never talked about it to any of my other relatives. I fear not being accepted [by my family], but I fear even more that my parents might lose face in front of other relatives if they found out!

Evident in Leo's statement, homosexuality still carries a powerful stigma in Taiwan, so much so that he has had to conceal his homosexual identity:

I don't think that coming out of the closet is important to me. Because of my family's problems, I believe that coming out of the closet would bring enormous harm to my parents.

It is for the same reason that he has never told his family that he is HIV positive. He has never even told his aunt, who is aware of his homosexuality, that he is HIV positive. Leo has not revealed his homosexuality or his health condition to his co-workers either, mainly due to concerns about discrimination.

Currently, Leo does not belong to any Buddhist group, but he says that he regularly watches Dharma programs on TV and chants mantras every day. He is looking forward to the return of his aunt, the Buddhist nun, who was studying in China at the time of the interview. He expects that she will be able to teach him more about the Dharma.

Buddhist Beliefs and Living with HIV

Buddhism seems to have an ambiguous relationship with HIV/AIDS. One researcher is even quoted as saying, "Buddhism and traditional culture have contributed strongly to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Thailand,"¹² while other researchers find that Buddhism brings healing strength to PLWHA.¹³ Although Gary and Leo seem to have different attitudes toward disclosing their homosexual identity, both claim that Buddhist beliefs have helped them deal with their health issues and the difficulties in their lives.

First, both men find that Buddhism offers them an egalitarian outlook about life. Perhaps because of some Christian churches' strong opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage in Taiwan,¹⁴ there is a general perception of Christian intolerance toward homosexuality. Leo, who may not know much about Christianity, states that:

Unlike Christianity, Buddhism is about the equality for all beings. So homosexuality is not discriminated against or even an issue in Buddhism.

Balthip, Petchruschatachart, and Piriya-koon-torn show that the Buddhist idea of impermanence offers comfort to PLWHA in Thailand.¹⁵ For Gary, it is the Buddhist idea of living in the present that helps him through many difficulties:

The transformation is [that I learnt] to let go. Be compassionate to others and also be compassionate to oneself. Whatever has happened are conditions that have already arisen. From a different perspective, HIV [teaches me] not let the mind fluctuate along with outer conditions. When it's time to take medication, I take medication. When it's time to take good

care of my body, I take good care of my body. Rather than using the word “transformation,” I would say that Buddhism let me be at ease with HIV.

Even the popular idea that HIV/AIDS is the result of bad deeds committed in previous lives¹⁶ does not bother Gary and Leo: both men refute such an idea. What they stress is how HIV/AIDS might affect their spiritual practice. Gary says,

I don't think [living with HIV/AIDS] is the consequence of bad karma; it's just karma. Blaming everything on bad karma is the real obstacle to spiritual practice. For me, spiritual practice is to be at ease with oneself and not to worry about bad karma. Happily living in the present is also a spiritual practice.

Leo shares a similar view:

I might agree that HIV is caused by bad karma, but homosexuality is not. Homosexuality is simply a different taste. There is no difference in liking people of the same sex or different sex. But HIV is an illness. Yet, illness is not an obstacle to spiritual practice.

Apparently, both men feel that living with HIV does not obstruct their Buddhist spirituality. The idea of living in the present moment brings them peace and helps them to overcome the difficulties of life.

Buddhism and Same-sex Marriage

In 2013, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan discussed what is called the “Bill Package for Diverse Family Formation,” which, if passed, will legalize same-sex marriage.¹⁷ Heated debates ensued.¹⁸ When Bhikkhunī Chao Hwei officiated the wedding of two lesbians in Taiwan in August 2012, she created the image that Buddhism is friendly toward same-sex marriage.¹⁹ But the real picture can be more complicated as some Buddhist leaders oppose the legalization of same-sex marriage.²⁰ One can also find Chinese Buddhist condemnation of homosexuality in online forums.²¹

Not surprisingly, both Gary and Leo strongly support the legalization of same-sex marriage and have participated in rallies to push for it. Gary has even been on radio and TV shows to advocate for legalization. Leo had been in a serious relationship for more than a year at the time of our interview and is adamant about the positive outcome of same-sex marriage. According to Leo, gay men's lifestyle often involves one-night stands, partying, and unprotected sex. He believes that should same-sex marriage be legalized, gay couples would be bound to more stable relationships (i.e., with a single partner) and the potential of contracting HIV/AIDS would decrease. Leo is probably speaking about his own experience since he contracted HIV/AIDS through one-night stands. He argues that the legalization of same-sex marriage can reduce dangerous sexual liaisons by bringing the value of family to same-sex couples.

On the topic of same-sex marriage, Leo reflects very little on Buddhism. Gary on the other hand, use Buddhism to argue for same-sex marriage.

Yes, because it's just dependent origination When the necessary conditions dissolve, then [the relationship] dissolves too. People just want to take care of each other. In my opinion, the Marriage Equality Bill simply makes [an existing relationship] tangible.

Apparently, unlike Christian debates about same-sex marriage, which usually focus on whether homosexuality is natural and sanctioned by God,²² the two Buddhists I interviewed accept homosexuality as an existing fact and approach it pragmatically. This echoes their understanding that Buddhism does not stigmatize homosexuality or reject same-sex marriage.

Buddhist HIV/AIDS Organizations?

As far as I know, there are few support groups for PLWHA in Taiwan and perhaps only two of them are religiously affiliated. In 1994, Mother Teresa visited Taiwan and suggested to Taiwanese Catholics that they should offer care to PLWHA. Subsequently, in 1997, Taiwan Lourdes Association, initially established by the Daughters of Charity in the 1960s for the care of underprivileged children, transformed itself into an organization for the care of PLWHA.²³ Although Taiwan Lourdes Association is a Catholic organization, Gary, who is actively involved in the organization, says there are few religious elements in its events, and it functions primarily as an educational and support group. The other group is a Protestant Christian organization called The Garden of Mercy Foundation²⁴ that was established in 1999 with the encouragement of foreign missionaries; in 2000, it established a hospice for PLWHA.

To the best of my knowledge, there is currently no Buddhist group that provides organized care for PLWHA. Individually, however, many Buddhists are involved in caring for PLWHA. One example is a devoted Buddhist woman named Su Yi Ling, the first Taiwanese nurse to provide nursing care for PLWHA. She is one of two nurses who were sent to the U.S. to receive training in nursing care for PLWHA in 1986.²⁵ Her activities have since extended beyond nursing care for PLWHA to advocacy. For instance, more than a decade ago, when a funeral home refused to provide services for a patient who died of AIDS, she valiantly advocated on behalf of the patient. This resulted in a series of lectures on Buddhist funeral services for HIV/AIDS patients.²⁶ Su has since written about Buddhist funeral services for HIV/AIDS patients.²⁷ Recently retired, she has vowed to devote herself to the betterment of palliative care for people dying of HIV/AIDS.²⁸ In her writings, she discusses the need for spiritual comfort in the care of people dying of HIV/AIDS.²⁹ Despite the rising number of PLWHA in Taiwan³⁰ and the fact that Buddhism is a major religion in Taiwan, Taiwan has no Buddhist organization specifically dedicated to providing care for PLWHA.

Research on Buddhist hospices for HIV/AIDS patients in Thailand suggests that discrimination is the most common reason that PLWHA move into specialized hospices.³¹ Concerns over discrimination are very evident in Gary and Leo's reports; it is the reason they give for concealing their health condition in the workplace. Both Gary and Leo expressed interest in having a Buddhist hospice for HIV/AIDS, even though they were not aware of such institutions in Thailand.

Gary, a gay rights activist, believes that a Buddhist hospice for HIV/AIDS patients should provide necessary palliative care. He reasons that such a hospice would avoid discrimination and provide comfortable surroundings for PLWHA in their last days. Leo, whose exposure to Buddhism is mostly from the Pure Land tradition, believes that a Buddhist hospice dedicated to Buddhist

PLWHA could provide the necessary rites for Buddhists. “Otherwise, we will be like orphans that no one cares about!” he said. For him, to conduct proper Pure Land rites before death is important; therefore, he was pleasantly surprised to hear about a Buddhist hospice for PLWHA and strongly favors the idea.

Conclusion

This paper is far from a comprehensive study about the lives of Buddhist PLWHA. I have merely shared the life stories of two acquaintances. The experiences discussed here focus mainly on the question of Buddhist welfare, although I touched a little on Buddhist spirituality. Both of my interviewees stated that their Buddhist beliefs help them to cope with the difficulties of life, and both deny that contracting HIV/AIDS could be the consequence of bad karma from previous lives. Not surprisingly, both Gary and Leo favor the legalization of same-sex marriage. Gary’s reasoning is based on the Buddhist concept of dependent arising and the absence of Buddhist teachings that object to it. Leo stresses the importance of Buddhist ethics, believing that Buddhism can provide a foundation for building an ethical life for PLWHA who are Buddhists. Both Gary and Leo expressed surprise when they heard about Buddhist hospices for PLWHA in Thailand. They liked the idea of a Buddhist hospice, convinced that it would be a haven from discrimination and a facility to provide necessary Buddhist rites before dying.

NOTES

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Working with People in Prison

Robina Courtin (Thubten Kunsel)

In early 1996, when I was editor of the FPMT magazine, *Mandala*, in Santa Cruz, California, I received a letter from a young Mexican-American in a high-security prison – Arturo. He told me that he had read a book by Lama Thubten Yeshe and that he was “moved by the teachings on compassion” and wanted to know more about Buddhism. What became Liberation Prison Project developed from there.

Within a year, I had 40 prisoners writing to me. I answered their letters and always sent books. I started visiting prisons: giving classes and leading meditations. It was very moving for me. I could see that these prisoners, these human beings, were just like the rest of us, but living in pretty dire circumstances.

The prison system is quite intense. In the United States, the number of people in prison in proportion to the population is ten times greater than anywhere else on earth. *The Economist* wrote that the United States consists of about 5 percent of the world population but 25 percent of the prison population. In other words, of all the people in the world who live in prisons, a quarter of them live in American prisons. In general, the sentencing for criminals in the U.S. is severe and prison conditions are dangerous. In California, for example, violence among the gangs is extreme. In California’s attempts to curb crime, the law states that a person who has been arrested and sentenced for the third time will receive a mandatory life sentence.

However, evidence shows that, even though crime has decreased overall since the tough-on-crime attitude of the 1980s, the prison population has increased immensely. Because of this, there is a terrible sense of hopelessness among prisoners. Many have open-ended sentences that often mean they will spend 20 or 30 years in prison before they are allowed to apply for parole.

Due to this open-ended sentencing, many of the prisoners I met over the years through Liberation Prison Project are good practitioners of Buddhism. Many of them – on death row or serving life sentences – won’t ever get out of prison. They have realized that they cannot change their situation, but they can change their mind.

I read the biography of a woman in Florida who, with her husband, was wrongly accused of murdering two policemen. She spent 17 years on death row in what we can only imagine was a nightmarish scenario – her husband was even executed. She said, “Finally I realized that I couldn’t change anything – but they couldn’t take my mind from me. So I decided: I am not a prisoner, I am a monk; I am not in a cell, I’m in a cave.”

This is the Buddha’s teaching, isn’t it? But the irony for most of us not in prison is that we often get overwhelmed by our circumstances, become victims of them, and blame them. My friends in prison don’t have a choice; their backs are against the wall. They must change their mind; otherwise, they will go mad.

In a reply to a letter from Arturo, Lama Zopa Rinpoche told him: “Your prison is nothing in comparison with the inner prison of ordinary people.” And that’s us! We’re in the prison of attachment, the prison of anger, the prison of depression, and so on. My friends in prison know this to be true.

What became clear to me from the beginning of this work was that the vast majority of the prisoners who wrote to us were working class and uneducated. They were from gangs, knew only

violence, had few friends or family, and had no money. They were imprisoned for street crime, often drug-related. And because of the adoration of guns in the United States, violent crimes leading to death are common. It was rare to receive a letter from a person who had committed a white-collar crime or someone who had an education. What is also interesting – and I still cannot understand why – is that, even though there are huge numbers of women in prisons in the U.S., in the 14 years I was running the project, only 5 percent of the 25,000 people who wrote to us were women.

One of the main programs in our efforts was to help provide prisoners with a mentor to communicate with via letters and to send them books to read and study. The country is vast and the number of prisons is overwhelming. It was impossible for us to visit every one. Besides, we would visit a prison once, and return a month later to find that all the men had been moved to other prisons.

So we developed a system that was, by far, the most effective way to help as many people as possible. At one point we had a team of 200 mentors worldwide. A prisoner would write his first letter, and we would reply briefly and send a book. If he wrote again, we'd write a longer letter and send another book. If he wrote a third time, we'd assign him a mentor. We also received collect phone calls and offered Refuge and the Five Lay Vows to them on the phone.

Many of the inmates went further in their studies and practice, but many did not. Still, they got so much from the communication and the friendship. For many, it was the first time they had a good, kind friend who listened to their problems, gave advice, and, crucially, gave inspiration, encouragement, and kind words. One young man said that he was taken into town to visit the dentist. The nurse, as is usual, casually asked him how he was. He said he burst into tears, because it is so rare in prison, and in the lives of many of these men, to ever hear a kind word.

And we sent books, thousands of books. We fortunate, educated people who are not living in prison totally take books for granted. We have shelves of books we rarely read them. By contrast, these men in prison were hungry for books, information, and education. Often over the years, their letters indicated that these books not only informed them about the Buddhadharma, but also helped to educate them. Many had never read a book in their lives.

One Puerto Rican former gangster told me that his “copy of Lama Yeshe’s book was worn thin.” If we have a book, maybe one or two people might read it. If they have a book, ten, twenty, or thirty people would read it.

The other tool we used was a 16-page newsletter six times a year. The benefit of this was amazing. These men, living in these garbage-dump environments where they are often treated like animals, surrounded by immense violence, and without like-minded people nearby, may be derided for their Buddhist practice. Reading about other prisoners throughout the country, as well as in Australia – gave them so much courage. They weren’t alone. They had sangha. They read the teachings and each other’s poetry, short stories, and letters about their experiences. They viewed each other’s art. They loved painting pictures – of all kinds of things, but especially the buddhas. Their art was amazing. We also offered them *Mandala* magazine. They lived for these treasures arriving in their cells.

For me, the experience of working with these human beings was inspirational. “Practice” takes on another whole level of reality. One of the first men I met in person, a friend of Arturo’s and a former gangster named Richie, told me during our first year of correspondence that he was very laid back, “but when I get angry, I get really angry.” He had killed three men on the streets. This is common among the gangs. And now, there he was, behind glass in the top-security prison, covered

in tattoos. It's all prison art, they proudly tell me! He was speaking to me via telephone. "How's your anger, Richie?" I asked, smiling. He blushed beneath his tattoos and confessed that he'd had a fight with his cellmate that morning and "put his head down the toilet. But," he said, "I took it out again!" Then, he had the guy thrown out of his cell and sat down to do his meditation on Tara! All the Latinos love Tara! That's practice! I thought. It's relative, isn't it? He didn't kill a fourth person!

The Puerto Rican friend I mentioned earlier, Timothy, told me in his first letter that he'd heard about how you could get spiritual powers from meditation. He was very excited! "Then I could harm my enemies," he said. "But I experienced joy instead! And," he added, "there was this green light in my cell. I didn't know whether it was internal or external, but I knew it was feminine." Later he read Buddhist books and "discovered her name was Tara."

One of our biggest obstacles in the beginning, especially in our efforts to visit prisons, was the bureaucracy. There were also many fundamentalist Christian chaplains who did not approve of us. In the late 1990s, I went to Texas to visit several prisons after much back and forth to get permission. I remembered a man in another prison who would have been devastated if he had heard that I had come to Texas and had not visited his prison. So I rang his chaplain in the hope that he would be allowed a quick visit. The moment the chaplain heard the word "Buddhist," he said, "We don't need people like you here," and hung up the phone.

Another man in Texas on death row wanted me to be there when they killed him. But the fundamentalist Baptist chaplain was very clear: "You don't believe in God, so you're not religious. And anyway, you're only a nun." Even though the law in Texas approves of Buddhism as a religion, that was the end of that. (The man's life sentence was later commuted.)

There are many Buddhist volunteer chaplains now, so things are changing, I'm sure. In 2009, after 14 years of running of the project, I turned it over to a colleague in Sydney. Many of the prisoners who wrote to us didn't become Buddhist. Some even wrote to thank us and said that they were going back to their own faith, Christian or Muslim. We'd always write back and rejoice. My main wish from the beginning was not to make people Buddhist. We used Buddhist tools, no question – that was our expertise – but my wish was to give the prisoners kindness and respect as human beings. My hope was to give them confidence in their own marvelous potential – to give them the courage and inspiration to know that they could transform their minds, find fulfillment, and help others.

Many of the prisoners talk about how they help those who are worse off than themselves. My friend on death row in Kentucky, Mitchell, is a dear friend and mentor to many of the other forty men he lives with. One of them, he told me, "thinks of torture all the time." Mitchell is his dearest friend. He understands him, takes care of him, and protects him. Richie, the former gangster, wrote about looking after his old Alzheimer-suffering cellmate: chopping up his food so his toothless friend can eat it, cutting his toenails for him, cleaning up his shit.

I saw Arturo again last year. He was 18 when I met him, freshly out of the gangs – a courageous decision in prison, I tell you. He had first joined a gang when he was 11. He has been imprisoned since he was 12, first in juvenile prisons. When he was 16, he was tried as an adult and is currently serving three life sentences. He's never killed anyone or dealt in drugs. He gave up the gangs when we met and has spent the past 18 years getting a high school education, studying languages, and practicing a spiritual path. Now he's 36, going grey, and hoping he will be among the batch of prisoners that California is considering letting out before their sentences are up because

of severe overcrowding. And Mitchell on death row? “I’m ready for that electric jolt!” he told me. He has asked me to be with him when he dies, and, of course, I will be there – assuming that I don’t die before him.

Shedding Light on the *Bhikkhunīs* and the Great Founding Women of Borobudur

Bhikkhunī Tathālokā

This paper is part of a larger article titled “Light of the *Kilis*” that explores what is known of the ancient Buddhist women monastics and ascetics of the Indonesian archipelago.¹ Prepared especially for the 14th Sakyadhita International Conference in Yogyakarta, the paper is based on research materials gathered from travelogues, local oral traditions, dedicatory inscriptions, monuments, and statuary, or what remains of these within their cultural and historical context. The materials span a time period of more than 2,000 years, from the 3rd century BCE up to modern times.

Due to space limitations, here I focus on the 8th and 9th centuries, and materials that are of direct relevance to the conference locale and of special interest and value to women in Buddhism. I touch on the feminine aspect of Indonesian *candis* (temples), and the appearances and roles of both the esoteric Bhagavatī Aryā Tārā, the human queen Devī Tārā, and her daughter Śrī Sanjiwana Prāmodhavardhanī, the latter two Buddhist women being key persons involved with the foundation and establishment of the world-famous Borobudur monument. I also highlight images of *bhikkhunīs* and the dual *sangha* (*bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*) that are portrayed on three levels of the Borobudur wall reliefs. These images are of outstanding historical value because we can glean from them an unparalleled visual representation of the monastic way of life of Buddhist women at the time. I review and describe these images in the context of the Dharma teaching stories they illustrate – shining examples of women’s leadership and eminence in the Buddhist *sangha*, as they were conceived of and understood during this period.

Womb of the Mountain, Mother of All Buddhas, and Tārā Bhavanam

Late in the 7th century, we find the first known appearance of the monumental works of Buddhist religious art in the Indonesian archipelago that have come down to us today.² These massive stone shrines or temples came to be known as *candis*. It is not known whether the word *candi* is a localized form of the Pali word *cedi* (Sanskrit *caitya*) or whether the word *candi* is related to the *bodhisattva* Candī (also known as Cundī or Candā), the Mother of All Buddhas. The *candi* temple form represents the mother mountain and contains a central *grha garbha* (literally, “womb”) that is the central shrine or image shelter where a deity, Buddha, or a *bodhisattva* might “incarnate” or come to dwell. Combining mountain, the divine, and the feminine was not a new concept in Indonesia, but a very old one, with epigraphical evidence dating from the time of the early megalithic cultures.

Nearly a century after the first appearance of Buddhist religious art in the Indonesian archipelago, Candi Kalasan was erected in Central Java on the Prambanan Plain in 778 CE on the instructions of the royal guru and Buddhist monk Kumāraghosa, with the support of Mahārāja Tejapurnapana Kariyana Panamkaran (Panangkaran). Candi Kalasan was originally named Tārā Bhavanam, dedicated to the female Buddha Bhagavatī Ārya Tārā.³ The king, Kariyana Panangkaran, was also known as both Śrī Sanggramadhananjaya and King Indra. His name has been found in the Ligor inscription from Nālanda, a Buddhist monastic university in Bihar, A Buddhist monk named Kumāraghosa, from the Indian Pāla Dynasty, who was a royal guru of the Śailendras, consecrated a sacred *bodhisattva* image here.⁴ From this, we know that there were strong connections between

the Śailendra Dynasty in the Indonesian archipelago, Nālanda, and the Pāla Dynasty in India.

According to the Kalasan inscription, a *vihāra*, likely Candi Sāri, was constructed and offered for Buddhist monastics in the Śailendra realm. The village of Kalasa was awarded to the monastery as a freehold (similar to a tax-free religious foundation)⁵ to support the shrine and the monastic *sangha*. According to this inscription, the Kalasan Tārā Bhavanam⁶ was the first and, therefore, the oldest Buddhist *candi* built on the Prambanan Plain in Central Java. This may be the earliest inscription mentioning Ārya Tārā in the world.⁷ It is a very rare inscription, because it is written in the Sanskrit Siddham script. The only other known Siddham script inscription like it in Java is the dedicatory inscription for the Javanese branch of Abhayagiri Vihāra, a community of internationally active Sinhalese monastics that was located on the Ratu Boko plateau, not far from Tārā Bhavanam.⁸ This illustrates the connection between the Sri Lankan monastic *sangha* at Abhayagiri Vihāra and the Javanese royalty and monastic *sangha*.⁹ This very rare Siddham inscription, circa 778 CE, also establishes direct connections between Java's esoteric Buddhist tradition, and the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean esoteric Buddhist traditions,¹⁰ all of which had dual monastic *sanghas* at the time.

The name Tārā appears in another closely related context at this time. Just three years before the consecration of Tārā Bhavanam, an inscription at Chaiya (the so-called Ligor or Nakhon Si Thammarat inscription) dated 775 CE finds the daughter of the of the Śrivijayan ruler Dharmasetu, a crown princess named Devī Tārā, marrying the Śailendra crown prince (Panankaran's son Samaragrawira, or Samaratungga), who became the king of Śrivijaya around 792 CE. The Nalanda inscription of 860 CE also tells of the Śrivijayan queen Tārā, daughter of Dharmasetu of the lunar race and mother of the king Bālāputra, a king from Yavabhumi (Java) who ruled on Suvarnadvipa. According to the inscription, Queen Tārā was the very likeness of Ārya Tārā herself, whether as a way of praising her or suggesting that one or more Tārā images were made in her likeness.¹¹ Queen Tārā is further lauded in the Nalanda inscription as exemplary of a list of female deities, as well as the historical Buddha's mother, Māyā. Whether or not the Devī Tārā referred to in the dedication in line 4 of the Kalasan inscription was this human queen and mother remains an open question. From the end of the 8th century onwards, the interchangeable names and figures of Devī Tārā and Ārya Tārā appear again and again in Indonesian sacred monuments and histories ("her-stories") in many forms. Her popularity and influence have been strong, long-lasting, and widespread.

Borobudur, Royal Mother Śrī Kahulunnan, and Śrī Sanjiwana Prāmodhawardhanī

By the 9th century, Śrivijaya had established monasteries in both eastern India (Bengal) and southern India, and had strong connections with western India. An inscription at Candi Plaosan (on the Prambanan Plain) that dates from around 800 CE refers to a "constant flow of people from Gurjaradeśa (Gujarat, India) – due to whom the temple was built."¹² It is noteworthy that Candi Plaosan is a dual temple complex, with a northern cloister (Plaosan Lor), a southern cloister (Plaosan Kidul), as well as a commons area. It has been hypothesized that the twin complexes may have been for a dual sangha (*ubhato sangha*), that is, for related monastic communities of men and women.

At the center of this temple complex, there are two two-storied buildings that constitute the main temple. The two buildings face west, each surrounded by stone wall[s]. ... The wall of the south temple [building] carries relief[s] of male figures, while that of the north temple

depicts female figures. The south temple [building] was probably a monastery for bhikkus while the north one [was] for bhikkunis.¹³

The Candi Plaosan sculptures are notably similar to those at the rock-cut cave temple-monastery complexes of Ajanta and Ellora, located in what is today Maharashtra. This is an area where the Indian *bhikkhunī sangha* is said to have been established with the Aśokan Missions in the 3rd century BCE.¹⁴ From these rock-cut cave temple-monastery inscriptions, it is known that Buddhists were active in the area from that time through the early centuries of the Common Era. Many of the inscriptions bear the names of *bhikkhunīs*, *bhikkhunī* student-teacher lineages, and great *bhikkhunī* teachers.¹⁵ These connections to the Indian mainland give us clues to the inspiration that flowed to the great rock-cut “mountain cave” stone works of the Prambanan Plain in Java, leading up to the now world-famous Borobudur. These connections between heads of state, leading teachers, monastics, and immigrants, reveal a shared appreciation of Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, and stylistically similar works of Buddhist art and architecture.

In the early 9th century, Nini Haji Rakryan Śrī Sanjiwana Prāmodhawardhanī, a crown princess of the Buddhist Śailendra Kingdom and granddaughter of Queen Tārā and daughter of King Samaratungga,¹⁶ married a prince of the Śrīvijayan Hindu Sanjaya Dynasty named Rakai Pikatan, in what is believed to have been a great act of political and religious reconciliation. Described as “one of the most enigmatic persons of ancient Javanese history,” it is generally thought that it was she who later came to be known by the title Śrī Kahulunnan, translated as “Royal Mother.”¹⁷ However, this could have been her mother’s title, or first her mother’s title and then hers. According to the Karangtengah inscription, it was Prāmodhawardhanī who in 824 CE established and inaugurated the *jinālāya*. The inscription also says that Śrī Kahulunnan established a *sīma* (ordination boundary) and a local tax-free royal religious foundation for the construction and maintenance of what has become one of the world’s most famous Buddhist monuments: Mūlā Bhūmisambhāra, or Borobudur.¹⁸ Prāmodhawardhanī further developed the 240 *pervara* (sub-temples) that form the *mandala*-shaped compounds of Candi Sewu and Śrī Kahulunnan, and is credited with the construction of the ancillary structures between 825 and 850 CE at what may have been a dual *sangha* monastery at Candi Plaosan. Nini Haji Rakryan Śrī Sanjiwana also developed the Candi Sajiwan temple and, in 907 CE, restored the local village of Rukam, which had been damaged by volcanic eruption, as a tax-exempt foundation for the development and maintenance of the Sajiwan monument.¹⁹ It is believed that the monument bears the name Sanjiwana in her memory and may have served as her mausoleum. While all of these great deeds are regularly attributed to one woman, the Queen Mother (Śrī Kahulunnan) Nini Haji Rakryan Śrī Sanjiwana Prāmodhawardhanī, they also could have been the dedicated efforts of two or three generations of Buddhist women: grandmother, mother, and daughter

The *Bhikkhunīs* of Borobudur

The Kamūlān Bhūmisambhāra monument known as “The Mountain of the Stages,” Borobudur,²⁰ is a three-dimensional diagram of the Buddha’s teachings in progressive stages: from the base in the desire realm, or *kāmaloka*, to the moral tales and early stages of the *bodhisattva* path as expressed in the Jātakas, to the final birth of both the *śrāvakas* in the Avadānas²¹ and the

Sambuddha in the *Lalitavistara*, to the culmination of the *bodhisattva* path, Buddhahood, in the *Gandavyūha*.

Bhikkhunīs are realistically portrayed in stone on the walls of Borobudur in several of these stages: in the past-life stories known as the *Jātakas*, in the heroic biography of Rudrāyana known as the *Rudrāyanāvadāna* of the *Divyāvadāna*, and in the *Gandavyūha* of the upper *bhadra*cāri level of the monument. There, we find the beautiful spiritual friend and mentor Bhikkunī Simhavijrmbhitā in her meeting with the aspirant Sudhana-kumāra. The images of the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* depicted here in stone give us a rare (perhaps exclusive) visual snapshot of how the 8th-century Buddhist monastic community and its *bhikkhunīs* appeared in Indonesia. From our present-day perspective, this is a revealing visual representation²² of either one school of Buddhism (whether from the eastern Indian Pālā Dynasty, from South India, Sri Lanka, or the western Indian Deccan) or the mainstream cosmopolitan international monastic *sangha* of that period in South and Southeast Asia.²³ The forms hewn in stone are revealing because, despite the abundance of images of *bodhisattvas*, Buddhas, deities, and royalty that have been preserved, we have found no other such ancient life-like visual representations of either the indic *ubhato* (dual) *sangha* or of *bhikkhunīs* of South or Southeast Asia.

Looking at the images on the *Jātaka* panels carved in stone on the eastern wall (south to center), we see five *bhikkhunīs* sitting to the left of the Buddha, with *devatās* above them, mirrored by seven *bhikkhus* sitting to the Buddha's right – all with their palms folded in *añjali* (prayer) gesture.²⁴ The *bhikkhunī* nearest to the Buddha is holding a lamp, and the last, with a devoted look on her face, is holding a flower. Both this first *bhikkhunī* and the second *bhikkhunī* are seen with their “darkening twilight-color” robes²⁵ folded high over their left shoulder. All the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* are easily identifiable by their lack of adornment, the simplicity and length of their robes, and their shaven heads. The *bhikkhus* sit cross-legged at the Buddha's right hand, with their exposed right shoulders toward the viewer; the *bhikkhunīs* sit at the Buddha's left hand with legs in the half-crossed side-wise posture that is still popular among female Buddhist monastics and laywomen in Sri Lanka,²⁶ with their covered right shoulder toward the viewer. Other than their sitting postures and distinctively male and female physiques, there is no observable difference between the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. The Buddha is sitting cross-legged with hands in the *vitarka mudrā*, a *mudrā* of teaching that involves Dharma discussion, debate, and the transmission of principles. This suggests that both the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* are equally involved in receiving teachings, Dharma discussion, debate, and transmission. It is noteworthy that the images of the two halves of the *sangha* are parallel; there is no difference in the height of their seats, front or back placement, ornamentation, or marks of honor or veneration. All are sitting with a serene near-*samādhi*-like demeanor of reverence and with beautiful smiles of happiness.

Further on, we find another scene, evoking a very different feeling. In *Jātaka* tales on the eastern wall, we find a *bhikkhunī* standing, wearing her robe on both shoulders,²⁷ but without the upper neck covered (suitable for a warm climate).²⁸ The *bhikkhunī* is the Queen Mother and, together with the other royal counselors, is part of a special envoy that have gone to warn a young king (her son) who has run amok about the dangers of his immoral ways, to try to protect him and the kingdom from disaster. Sadly, as part of the moral teaching of the story, he does not listen and perishes.²⁹ Looking back on this panel, we see the elderly *bhikkhunī* Queen Mother pictured earlier in her ascetic's lair (*ālaya*), sitting in a high alcove of what appears to be an ascetic's cave; then, we see

her being carried in a simple conveyance to join the envoy. Despite her obvious strength and presence when speaking to her son, the young king, she is now elderly and has experienced the rigors of an austere ascetic life. Women's monastic ascetic caves like this have been found and are still known in Indonesia, so it is likely that the scene represents a living local person at that time known to the sculptors.

Ascending to the *Divyāvadāna*, or “divine tales” level of the monument, a representation of the *Rudrāyana Avadāna* is found. At the request of King Rudrāyana and the *arhat* Mahā Kātyāyana, the *bhiksuni* teacher Śailā comes from Rājagrha to teach King Rudrāyana, the Queen Candraprabhā, and two other wives in the women's compound (*kaputren*) in the royal palace, while men listen outside the guarded door. The words of Acaryā Śailā seem to make a deep impression on her listeners, especially Queen Candraprabhā. Afterwards, the queen, realizing her mortality, decides to become a *bhiksuni* and dedicate herself to a life of asceticism in hopes of becoming either an *arhat* or a goddess. After death, she becomes a goddess, and, as she had promised before dying, she returns to tell her former husband what she has learned via direct experience about *karma*, merit, and rebirth. What she tells him moves him so deeply that he also goes forth into monastic life.

In these rock-cut murals, we see Queen Candraprabhā requesting the *pabbajā* (going forth into monastic life) from Bhiksuni Śaila, who sits on a raised platform with another *bhiksuni* companion next to her. Queen Candraprabhā's head has already been shaved and she is kneeling humbly on the floor with her right knee down and left knee raised, hands raised and folded together. She has a large, decorated offering tray in front of her, with what appears to be a single, enormous unfolding flower, but might also be her monastic robes and alms bowl folded like a blossoming flower, as sometimes seen in eastern India and Bangladesh. Behind Queen Candraprabhā sit seven women of the court women looking on with interest and obvious wonder. The scene of the *pabbajā* appears to take place right in the women's quarters of the palace, after which the queen returns with her preceptor to her *vihāra*, hermitage, or ascetic abode.

The *Gandavyūha* is a *sūtra* or chapter in a larger collection, the *Avatamsaka* (Flower Adornment) *Sūtra*. It tells of the pilgrimage of the young Prince Sudhana, who has set forth as a spiritual seeker and is fortunate enough to be guided by Mañjuśrī, the *bodhisattva* of wisdom. Mañjuśrī leads him to visit various wise spiritual advisors and teachers, or *kalyānamitra*. On his journey, Prince Sudhana visits 52 spiritual teachers, 20 of whom are female – a notably high ratio of female to male teachers. These women teachers include the Buddha's wife, his mother, a courtesan, a queen, a goddess, and a *bhikkhuni* named Simhavijrmbhitā.

In order to meet Simavijrmbhitā, Sudhana travels to Kalingavana (the Kalinga wood), where crowds of people direct him to the female *guru*. The wood is a royal park named Sūryaprabhā (Sunlight) with magnificent magical trees, ponds, and richly decorated thrones. Heavenly beings have gathered, drawn from throughout the universe by the spiritual power of the *bhikkhuni* who is expounding various direct and indirect Dharma teachings in accordance with the needs of her various audiences – a practice known as skill in means (*upāya*). The *Gandavyūha* describes Simavijrmbhitā thus:

The bhiksuni Simavijrmbhitā realized innumerable hundreds of thousands of entrances into the ten perfections of wisdom, beginning with: the equanimity of the universal eye, elucidations of all the teachings of the buddhas, the dividing the levels of the Dharma realm,

the destruction of all the multitudes (mandala) of obstructions, the origination of the thought of merit in all beings, the superior arrays, the container of unobstructed principles, the multitudes within the Dharma realm, the storehouse of thought and the container of universal brilliant realizations. And of those bodhisattvas and other beings who came to the great park Sūryaprabhā in order to see the bhiksunī Simavijrmbhitā or hear the Dharma, all of those the bhiksunī Simavijrmbhitā first urged them with regard to the elements (dharma) of the roots of merit they should acquire and then made them irreversible from [their path toward] supreme, perfect enlightenment.”³⁰

“She of the Lion’s Roar” is pictured here in stone in the Kalinga Wood, sitting in what becomes, by her presence, a shrine. She sits on a teaching throne supported by lions, with a *bhiksunī* companion standing behind her. Sudhana is portrayed listening with interest, surrounded by avid participants both human and divine, and beautiful trees. Due to the aging of the stone carving, her monastic robe is no longer distinct, except on her arms, her neck, and the folds of the cloth over her and her *bhiksunī* companion’s left shoulders.

Conclusion

Research on Central Java during the 8th and 9th centuries CE yields considerable information about women in Buddhism and the history of the *bhikkhunī sangha*. Ancient feminine associations of mountain, womb, and the sacred are combined in the Javanese *candīs*. The first temple in this area, which is dedicated to Ārya Tārā, a female Buddha, contains the oldest known inscription dedicated to Tārā in the world. A woman named Devī Tārā, who became queen of the Śrīvijaya Empire and mother to a daughter, is remembered for the inauguration and establishment of the shrine and ordination boundary (*sīma*) at Borobudur and for her enlightened activities (*buddhacāritā*).³¹ Through Queen Tārā and her daughter Śrī Sanjiwana Prāmodhawardhanī, we learn of a monastery that was apparently the residence of a dual *sangha*, which can still be seen today. We find inscriptional evidence of queens going forth into monastic life, of *bhikkhunīs* leading a hermit’s life, and of *bhikkhunī* teachers at court. At Borobudur, we see egalitarian images of the male and female monastic *sanghas* assembled; they are depicted at equal height and with equal lustre on either side of the Buddha. Such life-like images of the ancient Buddhist monastic community from a thousand years ago are rare in the world. These images shine inspiring light on women’s leadership in Buddhism and women’s eminent role and position within the monastic *sangha*.

NOTES

¹ The word *kili* refers to a female hermit or nun. Many thanks to Bhikkhu Ānandajoti and Patricia Buske-Zainal for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. My gratitude also to Earl Drake and Stuart Robson for their expertise and support for this research.

² They are the oldest Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna monuments that can be traced to the seventh century. Records of this time, when the South Sumatran King Sri Jananāśa began propounding the *bodhisattva* vow and practice of the *pāramitās*, mark the development of a new teaching, the Mantranāya School of Indonesia. This school was taught by Indian master Vajrabodhi, who

stayed as an honored guest in both Śrīvijaya and Java, and accepted Amoghavajra, a Javanese by birth, as his disciple.

³ A close-up of the image of Tārā above the lintel of the Tārā Bhavanam can be found at: <https://naliyam.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/candikalasan2528172529.jpg> and at a distance: <http://www.photodharma.net/Indonesia/19-Candi-Kalasan/images/Kalasan-Slide-00010.jpg>. The original central image is missing. It is thought to have been a bronze image around four meters high of Vaśyādhikāra Tārā, the “Supreme Tamer [of Those to Be Tamed],” a form of Green Tārā associated with Amoghasiddhi, sitting in *bhadrāsana* (“European style”) with her hands in *varada mudrā* (the gesture of charity) holding the blue *utpala* lotus. The dedication reads “*Namo bhagavatyai āryatārāyai* (Homage to Lord Noble Tara).” There are further niches for the 21 Tārās in this temple. Roy E. Jordaan, “The Tārā temple of Kalasan in Central Java,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole française de l’Extrême-Orient* 85(1998) 167-73.

⁴ The image of Sita Mañjuḥosa Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva at Candi Plaosan can be found at: <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1113602>

⁵ Note that in Indonesia, as in India, the royalty were known to grant freehold properties, that is, a tax-exempt foundation, to support a religious or public-benefit site. What this meant is that the people of that area no longer needed to pay taxes to the royalty, as those revenues were dedicated to the local religious foundation.

⁶ The inscriptions were made in the Siddham script, Candi Kalasan and the Abhayagirivihāra at Ratu Boko being the only two places in Indonesia where such has been found. The Siddham script was widely used by Chinese, Japanese and Korean esoteric masters. Willem Frederik Stutterheim, *Rama-legends and Rama-reliefs in Indonesia* (2 vols.) (Delhi: Indra Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1989).

⁷ Steven Beyer, *The Cult of Tara: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 6–10. As Beyer mentions, this is so unless one were to count the poetic verse by Vasavadatta, which reads: *bhiksuki 'va tardnuragaraktmbaradhrini bhagavati samdhya samadrsyata*. “Lady Twilight was seen, devoted to the stars and clad in saffron sky, as a Buddhist nun [is devoted to Tārā and is clad in saffron garments].”

⁸ The dedication in Siddham script reads: *Jinavaravinayoktaiḥ śikṣitā nam... <ya> tīnām abhayagirivihāraḥ kāritaḥ sin- halānām* and was translated in De Casparis (1961: 245) as, “This Abhayagirivihāra here of the Sinhalese ascetics, trained in the sayings of the [Vinaya] discipline of the Best of Jinās, was established.” “The relationship between Ratu Boko, the Abhayagiri-vihāra inscription, and the Sri Lankan Abhayagiri-vihāra has been underlined by several authors (Casparis 1959; Sundberg 2004), but this connection is not limited to merely one inscription; it is also architectural (J. N. Miksic 1993-1994; V. de Groot 2006). In fact, the whole southeastern compound of Ratu Boko appears to have been conceived as a replica of Anuradhāpura. Furthermore, the meditation platform, the most characteristic building in the meditation monasteries of Sri Lanka, was used as a model for the third building stage of the pendopo.”

Véronique Degroot, *Candi, Space and Landscape: A Study on the Distribution, Orientation and Spatial Organization of Central Javanese Temple Remains* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2010), pp. 110-11. It is not yet known whether the monastic community related to Abhayagiri in Indonesia had both men's and women's monastic branches as did the Abhayagiri community in Sri Lanka, yet there are no specific indications otherwise. It is known that the Abhayagiri *bhikkhuṇīs* were internationally active and mobile and undertook sea voyages for *Dharmadhuta/Vinayadhuta* missionary Sangha activities, as these *bhikṣuṇīs* undertook two voyages to China for the sake of the dual ordination of Chinese *bhikṣuṇīs*. There are also records of Sinhalese *bhikkhuṇīs* who traveled to India and Tibet.

⁹ The Abhayagirivihāra monastics appear to have had strong international connections between Sri Lanka, China and India, as well as Indonesia, including as seen here, at least one international branch monastery, specially highlighting the connection with Java. See Sundberg, "The Wilderness Monks of Abhayagirivihāra and the Origins of Sino-Javanese Esoteric Buddhism," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 160 (2004) 95-123.

¹⁰ The aforementioned master Vajrabodhi translated the *Sārva-tathāgatha-tattva-saṃgraha* (Compendium of Principles) into Chinese. He and Amoghavajra later traveled to China, and spread the esoteric Mantrayāna School to China, Japan, and Korea. Amoghavajra translated the *Tattva-saṃgraha Tantra* texts into Chinese, authored a version of the *Humane King Sutra*, developed Jinge Temple on the Five Peaks Mountain, Mt. Wutai, and promoted the bodhisattva of wisdom Mañjuśrī as protector. These teachings and translations in China give us an idea of the doctrine popularized by these two eminent teachers in Indonesia, teachings which are now called Vajrayāna Yoga Tantra, as well as being formative in esoteric Tien-tai and Shingon (Mantrayāna) Buddhism.

¹¹ Although the principle Candi Kalasan Tārā image is lost, this stone image from the walls of Borobudur is thought to represent Queen Tārā sitting at court with King Samaratungga. The walls of Borobudur are frequented by standing images of Tārā alone.

¹² Sheldon Pollock, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis," *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, ed. Jan E. M. Houben (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

¹³ National Library of Indonesia, "Temples of Indonesia," "Central Java," "Plaosan." http://candi.pnri.go.id/temples_en/desjruousu-central_java-plaosan_39.

¹⁴ "The Thēra Dhammarakkhita the Yōna, being gone to Aparāntaka and having preached in the midst of the people the Aggikkhandhopama-sutta (of Anguttaranikāya) gave to drink of the nectar of truth to thirty-seven thousand living beings who had come together there, they who perfectly understood truth and untruth. A thousand men and yet more women went forth from noble families and received the pabbajjā [higher ordination]." (Mahāvamsa XII, Dīpavamsa VIII.7).

¹⁵ Rock-cut cave monasteries for both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* are still found in cave complexes around this region of India, with many donative and dedicatory inscriptions containing *bhikkhunīs*' names. The inscriptions in rock-cut cave monasteries, where *bhikkhunīs* are believed to have lived, include the *bhikkhunīs*' section of the Kānhērī Caves complex Cave 12 and the Kārlē (Karla) Caves Complex located nearby the “twin” Bhājē (Bhaja) Caves complex, which were carved from the first-century BCE to the ninth century CE. Tārā is particularly found represented in four-color forms at Kānhērī Caves.

¹⁶ There is some confusion, as Samaratungga and Samaragrawira are generally thought to be one and the same person, that is, the son of King Panangkaran, who was also known as Śrī Sanggramadhananjaya and King Indra. Bālaputra was the son of Queen Tārā (per the Nālandā inscription) and Prāmodhavardhanī was the daughter of Samaratungga, who had no male heir (per the Karangtengah inscription). Various theories have been proposed to solve this question. Indonesian historian Slamet Muljana identifies Samaratungga as Rakai Gawrung, Samaragrawira's successor, that is, the elder son of Devī Tārā's granddaughter.

¹⁷ There is a dispute as to whether the name Śrī Kahulunnan found in these inscriptions should be attributed to Crown Princess Śrī Sanjawana (Prāmodhawardhanī) or to her mother, Queen Dewī Tārā. Boechari.

¹⁸ The Tri Tepusan inscription is dated 842 CE.

¹⁹ The Rukam inscription is dated 907 CE.

²⁰ *Boro*, *bioro* and *biara* are thought to be colloquial forms of the Sanskrit *vihara*, and *budur* a form of *bhudhar* (mountain) or *bud* (buddha)+*udhur* (mountain). As the name is also pronounced Barabudur, it is also possible that the meaning is *bhara* (stages), as in *sambhara*, so “Mountain of the Stages [of the Path to Buddhahood]”.

²¹ The Pali-text equivalent is the *sāvaka* and *sāvikā* (male and female “hearer” or disciple of the Buddha) in, for example, in the *Apadāna* genre of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*.

²² Visual similarities may be noted with regards at least one of the contemporary Sri Lankan forest traditions, as well as numerous paintings, statues and line drawings from Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia dating from antiquity.

²³ At the end of the 7th century, I-tsing (Yijing), the famous Buddhist monastic pilgrim monk and travelogue author, noted more than 1,000 Buddhist monastics at his place of residence in Indonesia mostly belonging to the then-prevalent *Mūlasarvāstivāda Nikāya*, but a few belonging to the *Sthavira Nikāya*. At that time, the then-recently introduced *Sthavira Nikāya* is generally considered to be the Sanskrit equivalent of the Pali *Therīya Nikāya*, which later came to be known as *Theravāda*. See Bhikkhu Anālayo's "A Note on the Term *Theravāda*," *Buddhist Studies Review* 30:2(2013) 216–35. However, in this case, it might also be the name of the *Abhayagirivihāra* school, which came to be known as *Mahāyāna Sthāviras*, according to the 7th-century Chinese Buddhist monastic pilgrim and travel writer, Xuanzang (also transliterated as

Hsüan-tsang). It is noteworthy that, both in India and in Indonesia, to study Mahāyāna Madhyamika, Yogācāra, and *bodhisattva* teachings was a monastic's choice, as I-tsing observed in Kashmir, and was not related or tied to their monastic *nikāya*, order, monastery, or ordination lineage.

²⁴ The Jataka stories on the east wall (south to center), panels 264-265-266, can be viewed at: <http://www.photodharma.net/Indonesia/04-Jataka-Level-1-Top/04-Jataka-Level-1-Top.htm>.

²⁵ It is not possible to tell the color of the robes in stone. However, the Candi Plaosan inscription mentions the “color of darkening twilight” in poetic comparison with the “Dharma cloud” (*dharmamegha*) that cools and quenches thirst (Seokmono 1995:60). The twilight color is also mentioned as the color of the robes of Buddhist *bhikkhunīs* in the Sanskrit poetry of Subandhu in his work *Vasavadatta* (Beyer 1973/1988:9).

²⁶ This half-crossed legged sitting posture is prescribed in the Pali-text Vinaya in the *Bhikkhunīkkhandhaka* in *Cullavagga* X.435 and in the Mulasarvāstivāda *Vinayasūtra* at 17.37. In Thailand, this posture is known as *papiyup*, or the “polite posture,” and is used by both male and female monastics and householders. Both men and women cross their legs for sitting meditation (*nang samadhi*). Laywomen and *maechees* (eight-precept nuns) also use the “mermaid” posture, kneeling with both legs a bit to the side, as illustrated by the *bhikkhunīs* at Borobudur.

²⁷ In his travelogue, I-tsing relates what he learned of the *bhikkhunī*'s ways of wearing the monastic robes in India: “When she is out of doors or before the monks, or when she is invited to a householder's home for meal *dana* [offering], her Kāsāya must always be wrapped round her neck and covering her body... [D]uring the meal, she must not bare her chest, but eat with her hands coming out from underneath [her robe]... Having one shoulder bare or having a shirt or trousers are prohibited by the Great Sage (Mahā Samana) himself, and must not be done by bhiksunīs.” (T54, p0216a, adapted from *Record of Buddhist Practices* XII:78)

²⁸ In the Jātaka stories on the east wall (south to center), panel 52, figures are portrayed wearing the robe with both shoulders covered, similar to one branch of *bhikkhus* of the forest tradition in contemporary Sri Lanka.

²⁹ From this and other examples, it seems that queen mothers were frequently consulted (and might even intervene) regarding important affairs of the kingdom, sometimes even after having retired into Buddhist monastic life.

³⁰ Adapted from Osto 2008: Endnote 30.

³¹ See Hudaya Kandahyaya's “What is Borobudur?” *Compassion and Social Justice* (Yogyakarta: Sakyadhita, 2015).

Buddhist Women of Indonesia: Diversity and Social Justice

Karma Lekshe Tsomo

Buddhism in Indonesia has received little scholarly attention, despite its long history and the flourishing of Buddhist philosophy, art, and culture between the fifth and ninth centuries. Although there has been considerable research and publication on the early Buddhist art and archeology of Indonesia, and traces of innumerable ancient Buddhist ruins can be found in both Java and Sumatra, little is known about contemporary Buddhist developments. Even less is known about Buddhist women in the vast archipelago now known as Indonesia. Some of the reasons for this are clear. First, in written histories, the lives of women are frequently overlooked, particularly those of minority women. Second, members of the Chinese Buddhist community have assumed a low profile in Indonesian society to avoid drawing attention to their generally prosperous economic status. Third, members of indigenous Indonesian Buddhist communities often live in remote areas, where they constitute a religious minority.

Although Buddhists of the ethnic Chinese and Malay communities are linked by a common faith, their lives can differ dramatically. Economically and socially, many Chinese Buddhists enjoy an elevated status, yet, as members of an ethnic, frequently suspect minority, they occupy a position peripheral to mainstream religious and political life. Indigenous Indonesian Buddhists are indistinguishable socially, linguistically, and politically from others in the communities where they live, but they do consciously distinguish themselves by their traditional Buddhist heritage. Women in both Chinese and indigenous Buddhist communities are marginal to the mainstream on the basis of religion and gender, even though individually their lives and religious choices may differ in significant ways.

Today Buddhism is one of five official religions in Indonesia: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism. The population is predominantly Muslim (86%), with minorities of Christians (8%), Buddhists (2%), Hindus (3%), and other beliefs (1%). There are some 300 other belief systems, including ancestral religions. In Indonesia, a variety of Buddhist traditions are represented, including Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, and an eclectic movement known as Buddhayana, which is by far the largest.¹ All Buddhists speak Bahasa Indonesia, but some also speak Javanese, Mandarin, Fukien, Cantonese, English, and other languages. Buddhism as practiced in Indonesia is a complex weave of multiple subaltern discourses. Threads of ethnicity, economics, language, and gender are interwoven with Buddhist beliefs and practices, and in this paper I investigate the roles of women within it. This paper is part of a larger project that intends to compare and contrast women's participation in Buddhist temple life in different parts of Indonesia, focusing especially on the ways women negotiate their subordinate status and identity as a minority within a minority in Indonesia.

Tracing Indonesian Buddhism

A number of experiences and contacts, like sprinkled crumbs that led to a cookie jar, sparked my interest in Buddhism in Indonesia. In 1972, I visited Borobudur, the Buddhist *stupa* complex in south-central Java that dates from between the seventh and ninth centuries. At that time, I had no opportunity for research and met no practicing Buddhists, as far as I know. When I studied in

Dharamsala, India, I repeatedly heard the story of how the Indian pandit Atisa Dipankara Srijnana (982-1054) traveled for 13 months by ship to Indonesia to retrieve the classic Mahāyāna text *Bodhicaryaavatara* (The Bodhisattva's Way of Life). Written by Santideva, a seventh-century Bengali prince turned scholar monk, this text had been lost in India but preserved in Sumatra. After returning to India, Atisa propagated these pivotal Mahāyāna teachings at Vikramasila. In 1032, he transmitted the text to Tibet, where it became the centerpiece of a major revitalization of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the 20th century, the text accompanied the Tibetan refugees who fled to India, and from there the text has been transmitted around the world and has been enormously influential.

In 1982, when I trained at the Institute of Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies at Yang Ming Shan, Taiwan, I became acquainted with several Indonesian Chinese women students who had come to study Buddhism. In 1988, while studying in Dharamsala, I was contacted by an Indonesian woman named Visakha Gunadhamma, who requested that I write a chapter for a book that was published in Bahasa Indonesia the following year, titled *Buddhist Women of Indonesia*. Around the same time, an Indonesian friend named Dhammawati was encouraged by H.H. Dalai Lama to translate the *Bodhicarya-avatara* into Bahasa Indonesia. I remember encouraging her, saying the task would not be so difficult, since Bahasa Indonesia has retained many Sanskrit terms from an earlier historical era when Buddhism was the dominant faith.

These coincidental contacts piqued my curiosity about Buddhism in Indonesia, especially regarding the roles of women in Indonesian Buddhist society. In 2006, Indonesian women attended the 9th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women held in Kuala Lumpur. Participants were surprised to learn about the widespread activities of Wanita Buddhis Indonesia (Indonesian Buddhist Women's Fellowship), which has established branches in many provinces for the benefit of Buddhist women. Between 2009 and 2015, I was fortunate to visit Indonesia several more times. During these visits, I conducted formal and informal interviews with Buddhists of diverse backgrounds to learn more about the roles laywomen and nuns play in Indonesia's diverse Buddhist communities, relations between Buddhist women and women of the majority Muslim population, and issues of cultural adaptation, assimilation, and identity among Indonesian Buddhists.²

This paper explores the roles of women in the history and development of Buddhism in Indonesia, based on my field research experience among Buddhist communities in Java, Sumatra, Bali, Lombok, and Riau, especially Buddhayana, facilitated by Wanita Buddhis Indonesia. My methodology involved interviews and interactions with women in ethnically diverse communities to understand the convergences and potential tensions among followers of diverse Buddhist traditions. Through these interviews and interactions, I learned about the diverse religious lives of Indonesian Buddhist women, the networks they have created to connect Buddhist women living in the far-flung provinces of Indonesia, and their efforts to link up with the burgeoning international Buddhist women's movement. Observing their Buddhist practice and grassroots activism, I began to understand the interrelationships among Buddhist women of diverse backgrounds and experience and the ways in which race, religion, politics, and gender intersect in their everyday lives. Gradually, I began to identify multiple patterns of acculturation and assimilation to majority culture among Indonesian Buddhists, including strategies of accommodation and resistance.

Historical Background

Most of what is known about Buddhism in Indonesia comes from Chinese records. As early as the first century CE, Hindu and Buddhist traders and teachers traveled from India to Sumatra, Java, and beyond. The famous Chinese monk pilgrim Fa-xian visited Sumatra in 414 CE and left a record of his travels. Soon thereafter, the Kashmiri prince Gunavarman is said to have converted the Javanese court to Buddhism. This visit may have coincided with the stopover of a party of Sri Lankan nuns led by the *bhikkhuni* Devasara, who were on their way to China in 429 to preside over a full ordination ceremony for Chinese nuns. It is recorded that Devasara's party of eight nuns did not constitute the required quorum of ten precept masters needed to officiate at a *bhikkhuni* ordination, so a request for additional nuns was sent to Sri Lanka. A second party of eleven nuns arrived in Nanjing in 433, where they presided over the first full ordination ceremony for women in Chinese history. The treacherous two-year journey required a stop for supplies midway, and it is likely that these nuns touched down in Sumatra and/or Java, perhaps multiple times. This journey is historically significant, since these Sri Lankan nuns initiated the Chinese lineage of full ordination for women that has continued in China, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam up to the present day and makes possible the contemporary restoration of full ordination for women in other countries.

During the late seventh century, the Chinese monk pilgrim I-tsing visited Sriwijaya (Sumatra) on his return home from four years of study at Nalanda University in India. In his journal, I-tsing mentions a Mahāyāna Buddhist king named Jayanasa (or Jayanaga) who, in 684, built Sri-Kestra Park for the public in Palembang as an act of merit. According to I-tsing, prior to the eighth century, Buddhists in the archipelago followed the Hinayāna tradition. Subsequently, under Sriwijaya rule, Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished, as evidenced by images of *bodhisattvas* discovered in Sumatra, Java, and elsewhere.

The Mahāyāna Buddhist Sailendra Dynasty, which probably originated in India, ruled in southeast Sumatra during the eighth century. This dynasty gradually extended its influence to central Java, perhaps from a capital in the Malay Peninsula, and continued to rule up to the tenth century. Trade between India and China was active during this period, and, along with commodities, cultural and religious influences were transmitted to Indonesia. The Sailendra Dynasty is responsible for monumental works of art, such as the massive *stupa* complex of Borobudur, which was declared a World Heritage site in 1991. Historical accounts mention a shrine to the female *bodhisattva* Tara that was erected at Kalasan, the oldest Buddhist temple in Yogyakarta, in 778. It is also recorded that, during this time, the city of Sriwijaya, in either Palembang or Jambi in Sumatra, became a famed center of Buddhist learning.

Prosperity declined as trade decreased with the collapse of the Tang dynasty in China. Trade relations resumed after some time, between 1003 and 1018, but then came under attack by the Chola Dynasty from South India. Despite periodic political struggles, there is evidence that Buddhism was still practiced in both Sumatra and Java up to the 14th century. A Chinese customs superintendent named Chao Ju-Kwa, who visited Sumatra and central Java at that time, wrote about a golden image of the Buddha in Sanfotsi³ and the generosity of the Buddhist kings there. Tantric Buddhist influences were also present in the region. An image of Aksokhya Buddha was erected by the saintly king Kertanagara who ruled Singosari in East Java from 1268 to 1292.⁴

Today, Buddhists in Indonesia continue to practice their faith quietly and largely unnoticed,

but maintaining their Buddhist identity has not always been easy. After Indonesia declared its independence from Dutch rule, on June 1, 1945, President Sukarno employed the philosophy of *pancasila* (from Sanskrit *panca*, “five,” and *sila*, “principle”) to guide the nation. These five principles are: (1) belief in one supreme God;⁵ (2) just and civilized humanitarianism; (3) nationalism based on the unity of Indonesia; (4) representative democracy through consensus; and (5) social justice.⁶ For Buddhism to qualify as a religion in Indonesia, it needed to meet these criteria. Accordingly, the Chinese Indonesian monk Ashin Jinarakkhita formulated the theory of Sang Hyang Adi Buddha as a supreme being. This satisfied the government regulation that all religions must be monotheistic and Buddhism was accepted as an officially recognized faith. Although the theory put Ashin Jinarakkhita at odds with many Theravāda Buddhists, it established a place for Buddhism in a religiously pluralistic Indonesia.

After a purported, abortive communist coup that resulted in the slaughter of up to one million ethnic Chinese in 1965, all residents of Indonesia were required to register by religion or risk being suspect of communist leanings. In response, the number of self-identified Buddhists increased significantly. Indonesian Buddhists may affiliate themselves with Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, Buddhayana, or a variety of other traditions. The Buddhayana movement is self-consciously eclectic; at Buddhayana temples, the Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna are all equally respected, and followers may attend study programs and chanting services in Pāli, Chinese, or Tibetan in the same space. Indonesian Buddhists agree on all the fundamental Buddhist teachings – the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and so on – and are open to all the distinctive forms of Buddhist practice.

Exploring Buddhist Pluralism

The first objective of my research was to uncover Indonesian Buddhist women’s history. Second, I recorded the stories of as many Buddhist women as possible to understand what motivates and sustains their work, the roles women play in Indonesia’s diverse Buddhist communities, and Buddhist women’s relationships with the majority Muslim population. Third, I explored the history and development of Wanita Buddhis Indonesia and how the organization has managed to link Buddhist women scattered throughout the country and build a national alliance that unites them.

My research on Buddhist women of Indonesia yielded many unexpected results. The image I had previously held – of nuns sequestered in traditional Chinese Mahāyāna temples – applied to only one small segment of the Buddhist population. The nuns in Chinese temples are often trained in Taiwan. They speak Mandarin and at least one other Chinese dialect in addition to Bahasa Indonesia and a smattering of English. They are expert in Mahāyāna chanting and rituals and provide counseling to their local communities. They also often care for orphans, who are raised in the temples. Resentment against ethnic Chinese is not uncommon and arises primarily due to financial disparities:

People of Chinese descent comprise only 3 percent of the population but are said to control 80 percent of the private-sector commerce. Not all Chinese merchants are wealthy, but some are immensely so. Attacks on people of Chinese ancestry in the 1990s echoed the mid-1960s “anti-Communist” rampages that killed between half a million and two million Indonesian

citizens.⁷

The second segment of the Buddhist population I encountered were Theravāda Buddhists, who tend to regard the Theravāda tradition as the pure, original formulation of Buddhism. Followers are generally well-versed in basic Buddhist principles, chant in Pali, and focus much of their energy on offering alms to monks. There are very few nuns in this tradition. Ayya Santini and two companions were ordained in Sri Lanka in 2000. They faced considerable opposition from Theravāda monks when they returned to Indonesia. Their ordination is a significant contribution to the revival of full ordination for Buddhist women in modern times and is an important first step in establishing an Indonesian *bhikkhuni sangha* (order of fully ordained nuns in the Theravāda tradition), though many challenges lie ahead.

The majority of my time was spent among members of Buddhayana, formally called Majelis Buddhayana Indonesia (MBI). I was able to connect with many members of Wanita Buddhis Indonesia (WBI) and observe their religious practices and organizational structures, as well as explore directions for expanding women's participation in the development of Buddhism in Indonesia. The relative gender equality and religious tolerance at Buddhayana temples are notable. Padma Devi, the former secretary general of WBI, said; "We have branches in 24 provinces all around Indonesian. We are promoting 'Buddhayana Spirit'" so our members are free to learn Buddhism from all *yanas*."

Ashin Jinarakkhita set about creating a strong organization of laywomen and laymen to support the ordained *sangha*. The first woman to become an *upasika* and president of WBI was Parwati Soepangat. As Ashin Jinarakkhita traveled around Indonesia during the 1960s, he inspired many people to become monks and nuns. At that time in Indonesia, Buddhism was associated with the Chinese community. Ashin Jinarakkhita had studied in the Netherlands and told Ibu Parwati that *bhikkhunis* must be well educated like the nuns of other religious traditions. They must be trained to give Dharma talks, not just to lead the chanting. The first generation of nuns was ordained in Penang. They were led by Bhikkhuni Jinakumari, who was ordained in Taiwan in 1963. This first generation did not have a chance to receive much education and engaged primarily in chanting. Bhikkhuni Jinakumari served as Ashin Jinarakkhita's Bahasa Indonesia-Chinese translator for more than 20 years. She helped establish two monasteries for *bhikkhunis*: Nagasena Vihara in Punsak and Avalokitesvara Vihara in Jakarta. She also helped train a younger generation of nuns ordained in Taiwan.

The second and third generations have received more education and can chant in Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese.⁸ Ayya Pundarika can chant in all three languages. As members of Buddhayana, the nuns may practice Theravāda, Mahāyāna, or Vajrayāna, as they wish, and wear the robes of those traditions. Some *bhikkhunis* left Buddhayana to join Theravāda or Mahāyāna temples, and Ashin Jinarakkhita gave them his blessing. He was very supportive of *bhikkhunis* and helped them to become educated, even sending them to English courses. He felt very sad if they disobeyed, usually under pressure from their parents. The third generation of nuns have all been ordained in Taiwan; not all of them have returned to Indonesia.

Buddhism in Indonesia was seriously hampered by government policies that forbade Chinese language education after 1965. Changes in government policy since 1998 have enabled Buddhism to grow in Indonesia, but Buddhist education is still seriously limited. Although many people profess

to be Buddhist, their knowledge of Buddhism is often scant and culled from a variety of disparate sources, sometimes mixed with Daoist, Confucian, or folk beliefs. The Tri Dhamma movement, which propagates a conjunction of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, is widespread in poor farming communities, where, for example, many Buddhist women may be unaware of the existence of WBI.

Bhikkhuni Nyana Pundarika is currently the head of the Indonesian *bhikkhunis*. Originally from Lombok, she is a very popular and enthusiastic teacher who travels constantly from temple to temple and from island to island to give Dharma talks and preside at Buddhist events. She has an excellent relationship with women, men, and children of all backgrounds and represents Indonesian Buddhist women's hopes for the future. She attended the Sakyadhita conferences in Bangkok and Vaishali, and is enthusiastic about increasing international ties with Buddhist women around the world. She and WBI took a leading role in hosting the 14th Sakyadhita conference in Indonesia in 2015. They were keenly aware that this event was an opportunity to strengthen Buddhist women's knowledge, organizational skills, and solidarity. Although support for nuns is still minimal, which may explain why many Indonesian nuns have disrobed or prefer to remain abroad, appreciation for the contributions and potential of women in general and nuns in particular is growing. The 14th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Indonesia has served as a catalyst to spur that growth.

NOTES

¹ Perwalian Umat Buddha Indonesia (Buddhist Council of Indonesia), known as WALUBI, is a lay organization founded in 1979 to unite the Buddhists of Indonesia, including Buddhayana, Theravāda, and Mahāyāna. In 1994, a wealthy faction leveraged the Theravāda and Mahāyāna groups against Buddhayana, to the extent that Buddhayana was expelled from the group. People were pressured to leave and some members were arrested. Later, the Theravāda and Mahāyāna groups also left. Eventually, these groups asked Buddhayana to establish a new Sangha organization, which led to the founding of KASI. When I visited Indonesia at the time of Wesak in May 2010, preparations were underway for Wesak in two different locations. Well-funded professional teams were setting up for WALABI's Wesak celebration at Borobudur, while hundreds of young volunteers were setting up for KASI's Wesak celebration at Candi Sewu. The next day, hundreds of Indonesian monks and nuns had to choose which celebration to attend.

² Buddhists are found in Sumatra, Riau, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and many other islands of Indonesia. Among the communities I have visited are Bandung, Lampung, Lombok, Jambi, Palembang, Surabaya, Maribaya, Medan, Padang, Jepara, Yogyakarta, Bali, and Riau.

³ The precise location of the vast medieval maritime kingdom of Sanfotsi is not known, but it was somewhere in the South China Sea. Chinese geographies often associate it with Java, Sumatra, or Malasia, but it was probably further east. V. A. Parthasarathy, K. Kandiannan, and V. Srinivasan locate Sanfotsi in the Philippines, *Organic Spices* (New Delhi: New India Publishing Agents, 2008), p. 14. North Borneo is another possibility.

⁴ Kanai Lal Hazra, *Indonesia: Political History and Hindu and Buddhist Cultural Influences* (New Delhi: Decent Books, 2007).

⁵ Bunki Kimura contends that this principle was declared explicitly in response to the atheist nature of communist ideology, after the coup attempt of September 25, 1965, allegedly masterminded by communists. "Present Situation of Indonesian Buddhism: In Memory of Bhikkhu Ashin Jinarakkhita Mahashtavira," *Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism: Sambhāsā* 23(2003) 63.

⁶ Lorraine V. Aragon, *Fields of the Lord: Animism, Christian Minorities, and State Development in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), pp. 311–12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ At the time of this writing, there are an estimated 97 *bhikkhus*, 25 *samaneras*, 18 *bhikkhunis*, and 18 *samaneris* in Agung Sangha Indonesia, the monastic body of MBI. In Indonesia, there are more than ten institutes and colleges affiliated with different Buddhist groups, including Kertarajasa Buddhist College in Malang, Bodhi Dharma Buddhist College in Medan, Nalanda Buddhist College in Jakarta-Timur, Syailendra Buddhist College in Semarang, Smaratungga Buddhist College in Boyolali, Prasadha Jinarakkhita Buddhist Institute in Jakarta Barat, and others. Nuns and laywomen are allowed to study at all but two of the Buddhist colleges in Indonesia. A number of students from these Buddhist institutes have gone on for higher studies at Indonesian universities and abroad, including promising young women scholars, such as Kustiani and Yulisant, who attended Buddhist colleges and have gone on to pursue doctoral studies.

Establishing the *Bhikkhunī Sangha* in Indonesia: Obstacles and Opportunities

Ayya Santini

The *bhikkhunī sangha* in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition has only recently been revived after many centuries with a lineage of higher ordination for women. I have been asked to talk about the *bhikkhunī* ordination process and the advantages and obstacles that I have experienced in my life as an Indonesian Theravāda *bhikkhunī*. Surely, I have much to say on the subject!

It is well known that the Buddha established four groups of disciples: the *bhikkhu sangha*, *bhikkhunī sangha*, *upāsakas* (male lay followers), and *upāsikās* (female lay followers). No doubt, the Buddha had many reasons for establishing all four groups. The Buddha would not have established the *bhikkhunī sangha* or the *bhikkhu sangha* if there were no benefits. The Buddha taught that women have the same potential as men to attain the highest goal in life, which is to get out of *samsāra*. He confirmed that women have the same potential to strive toward the goal of attaining *nibbāna* and women themselves have proved that they can do so.

We are fortunate that the Dhamma has endured, but, over the years, conditions have changed. There was a time when the *bhikkhunī sangha* in the Theravāda school was no more. This was not because women no longer aspired to become *bhikkhunīs*, but because they literally could not survive as *bhikkhunīs*. Women continued to live the Dhamma way of life, but as *upāsikās* rather than as *bhikkhunīs*. Some say that the *bhikkhunī sangha* died out and there was no way to establish it again – at least there were no monks who wanted to ordain women as *bhikkhunīs*. The *bhikkhunī* order was dead – full stop.

But Dhamma works in wonderful ways. I am very fortunate to live in an era when the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination in the Theravāda school is not just a dream. I feel very fortunate to be part of the revival of the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* ordination. In Indonesia, I was one of the first Theravāda *bhikkhunīs* ordained in roughly a thousand years, and I feel very grateful for that. Because of this revival, women have many advantages and opportunities to do meritorious deeds – just as *bhikkhus* and laypeople do. In this paper, I will examine these advantages and opportunities, as well as the obstacles that may arise in the process of reestablishing the *bhikkhunī sangha*.

Women who have taken *bhikkhunī* ordination walk on a Dhamma path that is orderly and clearly leads to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha instructed his disciples to spread the Dhamma for the benefit and welfare of all beings. As his disciples, we must always carry out the Buddha's instructions. Living as a *bhikkhunī*, I believe that the path is wide open. I see the way to the cessation of suffering. I can seriously practice Dhamma because there is protection in being part of the *bhikkhunī* order. Women, as *bhikkhunīs*, have all the conducive conditions for practice, including time, support, and encouragement from the lay community and fellow *bhikkhunīs* as well as *bhikkhus*.

With the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order, the Four Pillars of a Buddhist society – *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhunī*, *upāsaka*, *upāsikā* – are complete at last. The Four Pillars are the means for all beings to maintain contact with the Dhamma, so they can learn and practice it. The Four Pillars were established by the Buddha, so that human beings can live together in harmony, but ignorance, sometimes expressed as craving and aversion, has led to the loss of one of them. Now that all four are complete once again, we must maintain them and keep them safe. We must especially take very good care of the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order, which is still very young. Let those who understand the

meaning of this revival help *bhikkhunīs* and women who aspire to be free from suffering by following the path of Dhamma. Conversely, let those who cannot offer their help at least not put up barriers and obstacles that increase *bhikkhunīs*' spiritual struggles. Let nobody engage in this extremely bad kamma.

The Benefits of *Bhikkhunīs*

There are many benefits to society and other Buddhists with the existence of the *bhikkhunī sangha*. One example is their work counseling women with personal problems. The *bhikkhunī* order can protect *bhikkhus* from having direct contact with women. As is well known, despite all the ordination rituals and procedures of *bhikkhu* ordination, there are quite a few stories about *bhikkhus* disrobing because of desire. Some women who approach *bhikkhus* to discuss personal problems, including marital problems, may infringe the rules of monastic discipline, such that *bhikkhus* forget their spiritual aims. Some *bhikkhus* disrobe in order to marry one of their lay supporters. If women can instead go to *bhikkhunīs* with their questions and problems, sad situations like this will cease. In this very practical way, *bhikkhunīs* can help protect *bhikkhus* from temptation.

Another benefit of the *bhikkhunī sangha* is that women, as *upāsikās*, can have greater access to female monastics, since they are of the same gender. This helps develop mutually beneficial relationships of support and understanding between the *upāsikā* and *bhikkhunī* communities.

To accumulate wholesome *karma*, we need a field of merit. With the establishment of the *bhikkhunī sangha*, women have greater opportunities to create merit, since they can fully support *bhikkhunīs*. *Bhikkhunīs*, as women, may have a different approach and perspective than their male counterparts. They have different experiences than men and may see women's issues from different angles than *bhikkhus*. Therefore, *bhikkhunīs* may be able to understand women's life experiences better and offer alternative solutions. By offering these services, the *bhikkhunī sangha* fulfills a need of both the *bhikkhu* and lay communities, avoiding potential problems and creating opportunities for merit and good karma for all concerned.

Obstacles to Social Change

All social changes elicit varied responses: praise and blame, agreement and opposition – all the worldly conditions explained by the Buddha. The reinstatement of *bhikkhunī* ordination has also elicited these kinds of responses. Those of us who have received *bhikkhunī* ordination are open to praise and encouragement from all over the world and are not free from obstacles and disapproval. Here I would like to discuss some of them.

First, due to patriarchy *bhikkhunīs* still experience strong gender discrimination in Buddhist societies. Women are second-class citizens and are sometimes considered second-class disciples of the Buddha. How is it possible to uphold the Buddhist society with second-class pillars? Women and men – *upāsikās* and *upāsakas*, *bhikkhunīs* and *bhikkhus* – are equally the disciples of the Buddha. None are first class, and none are second class. We often see how laypeople look up to *bhikkhus* and put the other three below the *bhikkhus*. In other words, they have less respect for *bhikkhunīs*, *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*. It is wrong to do so. Every pillar has the same worth: to spread the teachings of the Buddha and help human beings get rid of suffering.

Many ordinary people (*puthujjana*) choose to follow monks, which is manifested in their actions. For example, on occasion, when some *upāsakas* (and also *upāsikās*) accompany a monk or monks and meet a *bhikkhunī*, they follow the way the monk responds to the *bhikkhunī*'s greeting. When they see the monk turn his face away without saying anything, they awkwardly follow suit. Are *bhikkhunīs* second-class? Another example is that some monks forbid *bhikkhunīs* to give Dhamma talks, which confuses the *upāsakas* and *upāsikās*. Perhaps they are familiar with the Buddha's teaching that people's spiritual attainment is not determined by gender, wealth, or academic standing, and yet.... No wonder the journey to enlightenment is difficult, if wrong views such as gender bias are held so tightly. This is ignorance (*moha*) at work.

Strangely, this ignorance can also exist deeply in the minds of women themselves. Not all women understand that women and men equally have the right and possibility to attain *nibbana*. Many women still believe that men are superior to women and that only men can be successful in their search to find the end of suffering. The revival of the *bhikkhunī* order comes as a surprise to them. Maybe they realize for the first time that women can also become free. The fact is that *nirarana* (defilements of the mind) still play an important role in our lives. But Dhamma knowledge and wisdom have the power to destroy *nivarana*. As the *Mangala Sutta* says, knowledge is one of the highest blessings.

In our struggle to enrich our lives and achieve perfection, we need the Dhamma as our guide. We need to learn and practice the Dhamma and develop insight so that we can eliminate the defilements of our minds. Still, many women consider themselves stupid and inferior to men. Some are not interested in learning and allow themselves to become defeated by these mistaken views. Therefore, it is our duty to work together to empower women, so we can develop the strength we need to struggle in our spiritual lives. Women gathering together is an opportunity for all of us to gain a greater understanding of the nature of life and the opportunity we have as human beings to achieve liberation – an opportunity that should not be wasted. May we all gain greater strength to struggle on the path and to live meaningful lives. May all beings be happy! May the best come to us all!

Images of Women in Contemporary Indonesian Buddhist Short Stories

Latifah and Ary Budiyanto

The view that rebirth as a woman is the result of bad karma has caused problems for the realization of gender equality in Buddhist families and societies. Differences of interpretation of doctrine and practice exist in Asian Buddhist communities, but a gender imbalance in social praxis remains very strong. The roots of this view can be traced to elements of patriarchal culture that have been assimilated in Buddhist societies and the ambiguities regarding women that appear in numerous texts in the Buddhist canon. For instance, in the *Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra* and the *Bahudhatuka Sutta* in the Majjhima Nikaya, the Buddha states that a woman cannot become a Buddha without first taking rebirth as a man. In the *Sagatha Vaggas* and the *Soma Sutta*, woman is portrayed as the personification of Mara's children. In the *vinaya*, the Buddha is quoted as saying that the entry of women into the *sangha* would reduce the duration of the Dhamma to 500 years. On the other hand, the Buddha also said that a daughter could become an even better offspring than a boy. In the *Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra*, the Buddha says that all beings can become Buddhas.

Short stories are a reflection of the worldview of a given society. Through an analysis of the content of short stories written in Bahasa Indonesia, this paper investigates the issues of image, status, and characterization of women in contemporary Indonesian Buddhist society. The aim of this exploration is to gain insight into the world of youthful Indonesian Buddhist women through their short stories in Buddhist magazines.

Sources of Patriarchal Bias

Patriarchal religious interpretations have made religion one of the institutions responsible for the socialization of gender bias. Farid I. Wajidi argues that the legitimization of male superiority in Indonesia comes from the idea of sin and its consequences in Islamic religious eschatological views pertaining to heaven and hell.¹ Many religious scholars continuously claim that most of the inhabitants of hell are women, as is believed in their tradition. In addition, they mention that the way to heaven for a woman is obedience to her husband, as a domestic creature. This gender-biased view reduces woman's human nature to the domestic sphere and limits her potential to evolve fully as human beings.

Later in the process of socialization, the family and surrounding environment become sources of knowledge about how to become an ideal woman, in accordance with the social order. These social institutions confirm specific relationships between men and women in various aspects of life. The process of internalizing values rooted in these institutions becomes the basis for social praxis that prioritizes men. This process is a construction that is constantly reiterated as an objective reality that exerts its power on the behavior of women and men. Patriarchal values are taught in the family and reinforced by other institutions such as religions, meaning that these values are generated both in the family and at the same time articulated as social values and norms.

Literature articulates the worldview of a society. Writers utilize expression, values, norms, meaning, and the idea of human beings as individuals as well as social beings. However, literature is not a copy of the real world. Writers of fiction exercise autonomy in their authorship, sorting out and selecting various aspects of the real world and responding to their imaginary world. Thus,

literature has its own reality. An image can be a picture of something or someone that is owned by a community.² In this case, we explore the images of Buddhist women and the ways they regard themselves and society as reflected in short stories, especially those publicized in Buddhist magazines. A parallel case is the *cerpen* (an abbreviation of *cerita pendek*, or short stories) in the Islamic youth magazine *Annida*. The *cerpen* has played an effective role as a medium of religious propagation (*dakwah*) because it touches the reader deeply and entertains. *Annida* magazine has a wide circulation and has had a significant influence on the behavior of Indonesian Islamic teens, especially women. *Annida*'s vision of changing young people's behavior is called *hijrah*, which is migrating "away from what God has forbidden."³ Symbolically, the magazine's impact can be seen in the changing ways that youngsters dress, such as *koko* suits (identical to prayer shirts) for men and *jilbab* (full headscarves) for women, which express their Muslim identity.⁴

In addition to the success story of *Annida* in shaping the ideal profile of Muslim women through short stories, many other literary works also elevate the role of religion in the process of gender construction and socialization. In addition to envisioning constructions of gender, popular religious literature conveys a vision of women's liberation. As seen in the novel *Genijora* by Abidah El Khalieqy (2009), such literature has the power to reconstruct society's image of women.⁵ *Genijora*, the main character of this novel, states that women [should] change their own way by themselves.⁶ She sends a message to the readers that women need passion, willingness, and the ability to change or determine their own fate and circumstances. This novel describes the pressures and confines experienced by Muslim women in a boarding school environment. However, in telling the story of *Genijora*, the novel also reconstructs the ideal image of Muslim women. *Genijora* is a woman who managed to escape the confines of her environment and find happiness in the Middle East – but for Indonesian readers, especially the feminist and intellectuals, this is likely an ironic end of the story as this region is associated with images of negative gender roles.⁷

A more comprehensive picture of women and religion in literature is presented by Natsir, who compares the images of women in two novels, *Ladang Perminus* (Perminus Field) and *Tiga Puntung Rokok* (Three Cigarette Butts).⁸ In his 1993 study titled "Perempuan Muslim in Fiksi Indonesia Mutakhir Novel Kontekstual (Muslim Women in Contextual Indonesian Contemporer Novels)," Ismed Natsir concludes that, on the one hand, the female characters are portrayed as women who fulfill their dreams of this world and the hereafter. Yet, women are also portrayed as if they have infringed upon religion. Both images of Muslim women are drawn in the context of the New Order Era (the regime of President Soeharto).

Natsir's study is just one of a number of studies on Indonesian literature that look at the relationship between gender and religion, especially in Islam. Research on Buddhist literature is still very limited, however. Therefore, this paper investigates literary images of women in contemporary Indonesian Buddhist society. The aim of this exploration is to gain insight into the world of Indonesian Buddhist women. To examine how literature reflects society, we use gender analysis as a tool: "The main task of gender analysis is to give meaning to the conception, assumptions, ideologies, and practices of new relationships between men and women and its implications for broader social, economic, political, and cultural."⁹ In addition, in order to reveal the images of women in short stories, we use feminist literary criticism to seek new meaning in the roles of women figures in literary works.¹⁰ Focusing on a specific literary work in socio-cultural, feminist literary studies can be done based solely on the story, apart from any structural analysis. Therefore, the story

and characters can be analyzed regardless of their relationship to other elements of the work (such as setting, theme, point of view, and so on) and can be connected directly to the socio-cultural elements.¹¹

Gender Content in Buddhist Short Stories

Prabasmoro argues that popular culture – in this case, short stories – as part of myth, contribute to the construction and control of women by turning something that is cultural and historical into something that is “natural.”¹² Meanwhile, Tineke Hellwig shows that patriarchal norms have dominated Indonesian literatures. Through the promotion of conservative norms, the position of women is limited and subordinated. As a result, women are portrayed as being socially inferior. To correct that, we need a more positive, empowering image of women.¹³

Literature is one of the agents of socialization, teaching appropriate gender roles. R. W. Connell, an Australian sociologist of gender, mentions that the “agencies of socialization conveyed to the girl or the boy were the social norms or expectations for her or his behavior.”¹⁴ In the short stories published by religious magazines, gender norms are affected by religious values. Through short stories, gender norms can be internalized through the depiction of the ideal female figure, and people get a more concrete idea about expected gender-appropriate behavior. However, in addition to depictions of ideal female figures, gender norms can also be internalized through the depiction of female characters who are not ideal and always, eventually suffer. Thus, literature can convey and reinforce both positive and negative expectations of gender-appropriate behavior.

To that end, the image of the ideal woman in Buddhist short stories can be summarized in the figure of Prajnaparamita. Based on the work of Sanghyang Kamahayanikan, Supangat explains that “Prajnaparamita is the result of the appreciation and experience of *dana paramita*, *silā paramita*, *virya paramita*, *kshanti paramita*, and *dhyana paramita*. *Prajna paramita* is the sixth *paramita* of the *sad paramita*.”¹⁵ Supangat describes each of the six perfections (*paramita*) as follows:

1. *Dana paramita* means a “noble nature that motivates people to do charitable acts and make merit.” Thus, *danaparamita* “motivates women to sacrifice altruistically for the sake of good deeds for the happiness of others.”
2. *Silā paramita* means “good conduct.” It motivates women to maintain their self-respect and dignity.
3. *Virya paramita* is a “sublime nature that is always active, enterprising and industrious, dedicated, not indolent in her service to humanity in this life.”
4. *Khsanti paramita* is “calmness, gentleness, and equanimity, which is not easily shaken by joy and sorrow, reproach and praise, always serene in facing everything.”
5. *Dhyana paramita* is an aspect that always gives motivational encouragement to women to reflect on the nature of life and her worldly life, so it will raise the awareness that humans are essentially the same. This awareness will lead to a call for trying to make others happy, not to hurt, harm or cause suffering to others.
6. *Prajna paramita* is the result of an appreciation for and experience of the other five precepts. It motivates women to be kind *bodhisattvas* and perfect mothers.

The ideals of *dana paramita* and *virya paramita* are evident in “Keputusan Yanti (Yanti’s Decision),” written by Chandasili Nunuk Y. K.¹⁶ The main character of the story, Yanti, is described having a strong personality, sharp opinions, and solid life principles. One of her principles is dedicating her life to advance the life of her village:

Once she completed her degree in the agriculture faculty, Yanti had decided to go back to Watu Gunung Village. At first, her father and mother did not agree. They preferred to see her look for a job at a palm oil company or become a public servant. But Yanti insisted on going home. She wanted to contribute her knowledge to the people in the village.¹⁷

The story portrays Yanti as a highly educated woman who still wants a simple life. Even though she had received a higher education and an opportunity to pursue a career with a good employer, Yanti chose to work independently and diligently to improve the agriculture in her village. “From early morning, Yanti struggles in her simple hut, her mini lab.”¹⁸

Women who are passionately dedicated to the environment become ideal images in the short story “Bahasa Alam (The Language of Nature)” by Samanera Nindi Arianto.¹⁹ This short story tells the reflections of two teenage girls, Rini and Nanda, who are developing their ideals about environmental issues. Their awareness of environmental issues was awakened after listening to a sermon at the monastery:

“Starting today, we are agents of change! Changes will happen if we want to change and we will make the barren land into green!” Nanda clenched her fist with passion, like a great orator during a campaign.²⁰

The Buddhist *vihara* seems to have a great influence on the lives of other teenage girls, too. In the story “Pertemuan Terakhir (The Last Meeting),” written by Atthasilani Sirinandi Emilia Septiani,²¹ the main character, Tia, is featured as an image of *virya paramita*. Tia is portrayed as having had the determination and effort to continue her education beyond the region, although this means that she has had to live independently from her parents since junior high school. Her commitment receives encouragement from her mother who is sincerely willing to sacrifice her own interests for the sake of her daughter’s advancement. Her mother hides a severe illness from her daughter in order to maintain her in school. After finding out about her mother’s illness, Tia manages to calm herself and keep the spirit of learning. This is because her mother, always serene and enthusiastic, has been transmitted her nature to her daughter. The imagery of *dana paramita* and *khsanti paramita*, which are integral to the mother’s character, play a major role in shaping the ideal virtue of *virya paramita* in her. The *vipassana* meditation method that Tia follows in the *vihara* later plays a major role in confirming her strength as a girl who has been separated forever from her beloved mother. Through her meditation practice in the temple, she gains greater awareness and becomes willing to let go of those she loves.

This image stands at odds with the image of other girls who appear in short stories, such as “Di antara Dua Pahit (Between the Two Bitternesses)” written by Nanang Sutrisno.²² Dinda is described as a girl who is active, cheerful, intelligent, and outstanding. However, Dinda is not able to open her mind and accept the fact that her beloved boyfriend Dido has an opportunity to continue

his studies in the Netherlands. Dinda cannot renounce her attachment and accept the departure of Dido, so she chooses to end her relationship with him. The weeping of the bereaved is also a theme in the story “Saat Aku Mulai Mencintaimu (When I Started to Fall in Love with You),” voiced by Lia, the main character.²³ Lia weeps and wails constantly because her boyfriend has left her:

"Yes, this is the answer to why I'm not ashamed to cry because of you ... Love, yes, love... that's the answer. But ... why do you leave me, when the petals of this flower are blooming beautifully with such fragrant scent? Only you know well."²⁴

The insatiable longing after being left by a loved one, which brings inconsolable suffering for a prolonged period, is also experienced by Awen, a wife in the short story “Istriku, Mengapa Kau Menangis? (My Wife, Why Do You Cry?),” written by Fayen.²⁵ Awen's wife expresses her disfavor for her husband's visit to the ailing parents of his acquaintance. When her father was ailing, she and Awen did not get to see her father until after he had passed away. Awen's wish to pay tribute to his Buddhist friend leads to her protracted weeping, as she recalls her late father and that she did not have an opportunity to see him before he died. In this telling, Awen tries to open his wife's heart, as he reminds her of the importance of detachment, feelings of devotion, and living life according to the Dharma.

The ways in which Buddhist values shape the self-image of women are also evident in the short story of Ana, in “Pilihan Hidup Ana (Ana's Life Choices)” by Aan Atmawa Sari Jatasirini.²⁶ Ana, who is powerful, passionate, and hardworking, desires to deepen her understanding of Buddhism by joining a temporary ordination (*pabbajja*) program in the capital of her native province, which will give her a chance to pursue higher education in another province. At first, the situation is quite difficult, because Ana has to leave her home while her father is working in another city, her mother is ill, and her sister and brother are still toddlers. She just has time to say goodbye on the phone. However, because of her family *saddha* (strong trust), her parents wholeheartedly release her from any family obligations and allow her to go study for many years away from home. In line with her Buddhist values, Ana is glad that, in addition to benefitting herself, the opportunity to study in college will also prove beneficial to the surrounding community and, especially, will open their eyes to the existence of the Buddhist teachings. Most importantly, she is motivated to eventually be able to share the Buddhist teachings and bring happiness to others, which is a way of practicing *dyana paramita*:

I was determined to give more happiness to the family by teaching the Dhamma of the Buddha that had I learned and by practicing the training stage of the eight precepts (*atthasilani*).²⁷

There is a similar short story titled “Kakak Kembalilah (Brother, Please Come Back),” written by Ketut Wijaya.²⁸ The story tells of the sacrifice of a teenage girl named Dhyana, who is willing to drop out of school to enable her brother Nanda to study. However, Dhyana is not able to accept the harsh realities of her life. She persists and is able to continue her studies by staying at the home of relatives, who give her a job. As the story develops, Dhyana's brother Nanda wastes the opportunity he received by taking college for granted. Eventually, he leaves college and

disappears without a word. Dhyana continues to follow her desire to change for the better, in accordance with her mother's message, "Strengthening [your] determination will lead to a change for the better." Finally, Dhyana begins living in a monastery and enters a *silacarini* monastic training program, saying, "Although Kak Nanda failed, I should be able to go forward and achieve my goal." Life in the monastery helps her to mature as a person, so that she can appease her family members, who are desolate and distraught because of losing Nanda:

"Mom, time will tell when Kak Nanda will return. What is important now is that we have to keep praying for Kak Nanda, wishing that wherever he is, he is always in good health," says Dhyana, to reassure her mother.²⁹

Thus, Dhyana appears as a woman who is eager to improve, persist, work hard, sacrifice, and deal calmly with problems. The mother appears as one who motivates and encourages her daughter to continue moving forward, despite having to face the difficulties of life.

Concluding Remarks

The short stories above demonstrate the Buddhist values that nurture women's character development and support their struggles to deal with life constructively. In these ways, the stories generally convey positive and inspiring images of women. Religious values do not force women into bondage and inferiority. Instead, Buddhist values help the female characters develop into women who are self-sacrificing, persistent, and passionate, dedicated to the environment, and working hard to move forward. Although some of the women portrayed in these Buddhist short stories still conform to popular stereotypes of women in Indonesia, the positive Buddhist influences and images conveyed are hopeful signs.

Contemporary Islamic short stories and novels generally seem to illustrate how gender roles and women's movements are restricted by religion. This is very different from the general nuance of Buddhist short stories, which give women freedom and power and are, therefore, empowering for women. This positive spirit should encourage Buddhist writers, women in particular, to be a greater presence in the literary world, just like Indonesian Muslim women writers. The greater visibility of women writers is evident in the case of Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP)³⁰ and its magazine, *Annida*, which have helped change the environment for the post-1990s generation (for example, "Hijrah"), especially Indonesian Muslim women.³¹ Perhaps the productive organizational steps of FLP will be emulated by a new generation of Buddhist women.

NOTES

¹ Farid Wajidi, "Perempuan dan Agama: Sumbangan Riffaat Hasan," *Dinamika Gerakan Perempuan Indonesia*, ed. Fauzie Ridjal (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1993), p. 12.

² Anton M. Moeliono, et.al., *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Depdiknas & Balai Pustaka, 2001), p. 216.

³ Hadith Imam Al-Bukhari and Muslim 6484, <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/81/73>, accessed April 20, 2015.

⁴ Latifah and Ary Budiyo, “Annida and the Contemporary Islamic Society of Indonesia,” paper presented at Media in Asia: Aspirations, Choices, and Realities, 15th Asian Media Information and Communication (AMIC) Annual Conference, July 17-20, 2006, in Penang, Malaysia.

⁵ Abidah El Khalieqy, *Genijora* (Bandung: Qanita-Mizan Pustaka, 2009).

⁶ “*Lalu, dimana tempatmu berdiri dalam rumah patriarki? Kecuali membelokkan sejarah di atas jalanku sendiri?* (Then where do you stand in the house of patriarchy? Except deflecting the history in my own way?).” Ibid., p. 186.

⁷ Latifah, “Analisis Naratologi dan Kritik Sastra Feminis Novel Genijora Karya Abidah El Khalieqy,” Undergraduate thesis, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, 2005.

⁸ Ismed Natsir, “Perempuan Muslim dalam Fiksi Indonesia Mutakhir Novel Kontekstual or Muslim Women in Indonesia's Recent Fiction Contextual Novellete,” in *Citra Wanita Pekerja dalam Novel-Novel Indonesia: Analisis Kritik Feminis* [The Image of Women Labor in Indoneisan Novels: An Analysis of Feminist Literary Critics], ed. Armini Arbain (Padang: Universitas Andalas, 2007), p. 14.

⁹ Mansour Fakhri, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial* (Gender Analysis and Social Transformation) (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), p. 16.

¹⁰ Saryati Nadjmuddin Tome, “Isu Wanita dalam Novel La Barka: Sebuah Analisis Kritik Sastra Feminis (Women Issues in *La Barka*: An Analysis of Feminist Literary Criticism),” Postgraduate thesis, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, 1992, p. 17.

¹¹ Umar Junus, *Sastra Melayu Modern: Fakta dan Interpretasi* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Malaysia, 1984).

¹² Aquarini Priyatna Prabasmoro, *Kajian Budaya Feminis: Tubuh, Sastra, dan Budaya Pop* (Feminist Cultural Studies: Body, Literature, and Pop Culture) (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2006).

¹³ Rahmadi Fathurahman dan Wiwit Rizka, *Perempuan in Relasi Agama dan Negara* (Women in Religion and State Relation) (Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan, 2010).

¹⁴ Raewyn Connell, *Gender: In World Perspective* (Cambridge, U. K.: Polity Press, 2009), p. 77.

¹⁵ Metta Parwati Supangat, “Prajnaparamita Sebagai Perlambang dari Sifat Keibuan dalam Buddha Dharma (Prajnaparamita as a Symbol of Motherhood Appanage in Buddha Dharma),”

Buddha Dharma dan Wanita (Buddhism and Women), ed. Maha Upasika Visakha Gunadharma (Jakarta: Yayasan Mahabodhi Indonesia, 1987), p. 49.

¹⁶ Chandasili Nunuk Y. K., “Keputusan Yanti,” *Dhammacakka* 65:17(February 2012) 38-40.

¹⁷ *Begitu selesai kuliah dari fakultas pertanian Yanti memutuskan pulang alias kembali ke dusun Watu Gunung. Mulanya bapak dan ibu tidak setuju. Mereka lebih suka melihat putrinya mencari kerja di perusahaan kelapa sawit, jadi pegawai negeri atau jadi karyawati. Tapi, Yanti bersikeras untuk pulang. Ia ingin menyumbangkan pengetahuannya bagi penduduk di dusun.* Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁸ “Yanti yang sedari pagi sudah berlutut di gubuk sederhana, laboratorium mini miliknya.” Ibid.

¹⁹ Nindi Arianto, “Bahasa Alam,” *Dhammadipa Arama*, No. 12, Edisi Kathina, 2556 TB/2012, pp. 14-16.

²⁰ “Mulai hari ini kita adalah agen-agen perubahan! Perubahan akan terjadi jika kita mau mengubah dan kita akan membuat tanah yang gersang menjadi hijau!” Nanda mengepalkan tangannya dengan semangat seperti seorang orator ulung saat kampanye. Ibid., p. 16.

²¹ Sirinandi Emilia Septiani, “Pertemuan Terakhir,” *Dhammadipa Arama*, No. 13, Edisi Magha Puja, 2556 TB/2013, pp. 21-23.

²² Nanang Sutrisno, “Di antara Dua Pahit (Between the Two Bitternesses),” *Dhammadipa Arama*, No. 10, Edisi Waisak 2556 TB/2013, pp. 34-38.

²³ Anonymous, “Saat Aku Mulai Mencintaimu (When I Started to Fall in Love with You),” *Rakit*, Edisi III, July-September 1998, pp. 23-24.

²⁴ *Ya, inilah jawabnya mengapa aku tak malu menangis karenamu... Cinta, ya cinta Cuma itu jawabannya. Tapi,... mengapa kau pergi di saat kuntum-kuntum bunga ini telah semakin mekar, indah semerbak mewangi? Cuma kamu yang tahu, “Saat Aku Mulai Mencintaimu,”* Ibid., p. 24.

²⁵ Fayen, “Istriku, Mengapa Kau Menangis? (My Wife, Why Do You Cry?),” *Sinar Dharma*, Edisi 07, Kathina 2548 BE/2004, pp. 40, 45.

²⁶ Aan Atmawa Sari Jatasirini, “Pilihan Hidup Ana (Ana’s Life Choices),” *Dhammadipa Arama*, No. 4, Edisi Kathina, 2554/2010, pp. 18-21.

²⁷ *Aku bertekad akan memberikan kebahagiaan yang lebih kepada keluargaku dengan mengajarkan Dhamma ajaran Sang Buddha yang selama ini aku pelajari dan praktikkan dengan tahap latihan menjadi atthasilani.* Ibid., p.21.

²⁸ Ketut Wijayati, “Kakak Kembalilah (Brother, Please Come Back),” *Dhammacakka*, Edisi Kathina, No. 56, Vol. 15, October 2009, pp. 36-39.

²⁹ *Bu, biarlah waktu yang akan menjawab kapan Kak Nanda akan pulang. Yang penting sekarang kita harus tetap berdoa untuk Kak Nanda, agar di manapun dia berada selalu in keadaan sehat,” ujar Dhyana untuk menenangkan hati sang ibu. Ibid., p. 39.*

³⁰ FLP was established in February 22, 1997, by Helvy Tiana Rosa, Asma Nadia and Maimon Herawati, initially just as a forum for writers in Jakarta. Since then, FLP has become a driving force for thousands of young writers, readers, and lovers of literature. FLP currently reaches more than 10,000 authors and has branches in many regions and countries, such as the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Australia, etc. The vision of the organization is to provide enlightenment through writing. See http://sastra.perpusnas.go.id/home/komunitas_sastra_detail/16, accessed April 22, 2015.

³¹ Latifah and Ary Budiyanto, “‘Annida’ and the Contemporary Islamic Society of Indonesia,” paper presented at the 15th AMIC Annual Conference on Religion, Media, and Development, in Penang, Malaysia, July 17-20, 2006; Latifah and Ary Budiyanto, “The Moving Words of FLP, Youthful Helvy and Religious Revivalism in Contemporary Indonesia,” paper presented at the 1st International Conference on Muslim Youth as Agents of Change in Indonesia, Butu Malang, Indonesia, November 27-29, 2007; and Latifah and Ary Budiyanto, “Islamic Teen-lit: Pious or Vicious Fiction? Reading The Dakwah Voices of ‘Annida’s’ Short Stories,” paper presented at the 2nd Conference of the Kartini Asia Network on The Future of Asian Feminisms: Confronting Fundamentalisms, Conflict and Neoliberalism, Bali, Indonesia, November 2-5, 2008.

Bedhaya Ketawang: A Sacred Dance of Mystical Union of The Ruler of the Land and the Ruler of the Sea

Parwati Wahjono

Bedhaya is a sacred ceremonial dance, created around the first half of 16th century, that is performed in temples as an act of worship to the gods. Originally the dancers, called *lenggotbawa*, were seven beautiful, charming, gracious nymphs created by Batara Brahma with special duties in heaven (*kahyangan*). In its further development, the traditional sacred *bedhaya* dance was regarded as the creation of Kangjeng Ratu Kidul Kencanasari, the Queen of the South Sea. She added two *bedhaya* dancers, for a total of nine. The Queen of the South Sea offered this *bedhaya* to the King of Mataram, Panembahan Senapati.

This sacred dance got the name *bedhaya ketawang* when Sultan Agung adopted it during the first half of the 17th century. This traditional ceremonial dance was accompanied by five melodic structures of gamelan, the five *pelog paathet*; namely, *kemanak*, *kendhang*, *gong*, *kethuk*, and *kenong*. Up to the present day, *bedhaya ketawang* is performed in the court of Surakarta on special, very important occasions, such as on the coronation day of a new king, and every year on the anniversary of the king's ascension to the throne. Usually, a performance of *bedhaya ketawang* lasts for two and a half hours, but Susuhunan Paku Buwana X has shortened it to one and a half hours.

Bedhaya Ketawang is a sacred dance that presents Kangjeng Ratu Kidul. On very special occasions, *bedhaya ketawang* is performed by Kangjeng Ratu Kidul herself, who dances together with the nine *bedhayas*. Only a wisdom being or clairvoyant can see her or feel her presence. Every 35 days, on the occasion of *anggara kasih (selasa kliwon)*, when the court holds a rehearsal (*gladhen*) of the *bedhaya* dance, Kangjeng Ratu Kidul presents herself toward the right and simulates the *bedhaya* movements. On this very sacred occasion, everyone involved in the *bedhaya* ritual performance – the dancers, gamelan performers (*niyagas*), puppeteers (*warangganas*), and all the court families – must be in a state of purity, both physically and spiritually, at the rehearsals and every performance. All of them must bathe, wash their hair with a special herbal shampoo (*landha merang*), and fast for a full day before the performance. A key concept of the *bedhaya ketawang* is described in the lyrics of a song (*tembang*): “This life is like a brightly burning fire. If death should come, where would we be?” This song concerns the origins and the destination of life (*sangkan paraning dumadi*).

As a ritual dance, *bedhaya ketawang* is described symbolically as the sacred mystical union between Kangjeng Ratu Kidul, the Queen of the South Sea, and Sultan Agung, the King of Mataram, and his successors. The *bedhaya ketawang* dancers wear a wedding cloth (*busana pengantin basahan*), traditional bridal makeup (*paes*), a unique hair style (*bokor mengkurep*) with accessories (such as *centhung*, *garudha mungkur*, *sisir jeram saajar*, *cundhuk mentul*), and jasmine flowers (*melathi*) cascading down their right breast. Through the refined movements of hands, bodies, and scarves, the ritual dance symbolically expresses the outpouring out of Kangjeng Ratu Kidul's deepest love for Sultan Agung. As Sultan Agung joins with the mythical Ratu Kidul in sacred union, he establishes a close family bond between Ratu Kidul and the kings of Mataram who succeed him. On special occasions, such as when facing a threat of war, the king of Mataram may ask the help of Ratu Kidul's invisible troops.

Compassionate Legacy: Mahayana Buddhism in Sumatra and its Connections with Tibet

Annie McGhee

Buddhism was established in Southeast Asia around the sixth century, via traders from India who had begun trading in the region as early as the first century. The growth of trade with India brought coastal people in much of maritime Southeast Asia into contact with Hinduism and Buddhism, allowing Indian religions, cultural traditions, and Sanskrit language to spread, mingle with, and gradually supplant the animistic beliefs and practices of people in the region. Sanskrit texts from the third century mention a region known as Suvarnadvipa, “The Golden Isle,” presumed to be Sumatra.

Considering the certainty that scholars and monks moved along with traders and migrants between China, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, India, and beyond, it is no surprise that similarities emerged among the Buddhist temples, teachings, and practices in these countries. In Indonesia, Buddhism was confined mainly to the islands of Sumatra and Java, but the religions co-existed harmoniously alongside each other, particularly in central Java.

In the fifth century, Gunavarman, a monk and member of the Kashmiri royal family, traveled to Sumatra and converted the queen to Mahayana Buddhism. As a result, the Mahayana form of Buddhism became the official practice of the Sriwijayan and Sailendra dynasties.¹ Mahayana Buddhism reached its height during the eighth and ninth centuries with the Sriwijaya Dynasty in Sumatra and the Mataram Dynasty in Java, ruled by the Javanese Sailendras. It was the Sailendras who were responsible for the building of numerous *candis* (temples) near present-day Yogyakarta, including Borobudur, Kalasan (dedicated to Arya Tara), Sewu, Mendut (which predates Borobudur), and other *candis* in Prambanan. Archeological evidence attests that the Javanese in these areas practiced the Vajrayana form of Mahayana.

Despite the fact that Sumatra is the largest of the some 17,000 islands comprising the Indonesia archipelago, few of its archeological sites have been explored. The Buddhist *candis* and temple complexes dating from the Sriwijaya era in Sumatra include Muara Jambi, Muara Takus, and Padang Lawas. The Sumatran *candis* were constructed from baked brick, unlike the temples of central Java, which were of andesite (volcanic stone). Muara Takus, in Riau Province, is unique in that one of its *candis*, Mahligai, is constructed in the traditional Kadampa style, with a bell-shaped design showing Indian influence. This is the only Kadampa stupa in Indonesia. The site is currently on a world heritage tentative list with UNESCO.

Sriwijaya

During the Golden Age of Buddhism in Southeast Asia, the powerful Sumatran kingdom of Sriwijaya (7th–13th centuries) renowned for bringing Buddhism to Indonesia, was a vast maritime empire that exerted tremendous influence over Nusantara (the Indonesian islands), Southern Thailand, Cambodia, and the Malay peninsula. The Sanskrit word *sriwijaya* is composed of *sri*, meaning bright and radiant, and *wijaya*, meaning glorious and victorious. The kingdom of Sriwijaya occupied a strategic position on the Melaka Strait and controlled the international route from China to India, Sri Lanka, the Middle East, and beyond. It was also a pilgrimage trail, with Chinese pilgrims stopping over on their way to study at the long-established learning centers of India, such as Nalanda, Vikramasila, and Odantapuri.

Despite the fact that Sriwijaya had religious, cultural, and trade links with both the Pala Empire in Bengal and the Islamic caliphate in the Middle East, there is little historical data regarding Sriwijaya. Among the first to open the subject up for discussion was Professor Georges Coedes, who shared his findings in his 1918 paper, *Le Royaume de Sriwijaya*.² The empire is mentioned in a few *prasasti* (inscriptions), written in Pallava script Old Malay, that were discovered from the Buddhist kingdoms of Java and Sumatra. They show epigraphical evidence of various types: Mahayana *mantras*, seed syllables, prayers for the welfare of all beings, the occasional curse, and proclamations by kings to their subjects. Numerous metal *vajras* (Tibetan: *dorjes*), symbolizing indestructibility in Vajrayana Buddhism, have been discovered, as well as statuary that includes images of the deities of Heruka, Amoghapasa, Amoghasiddi, Manjusri, Avolokitesvara, and Maitreya. These indicate the extent of Mahayana Vajrayana influence in Sumatra.

Sriwijaya as a Center of Learning

Although other Chinese monks and scholars had visited Sriwijaya, the first accounts of Sriwijaya as a large center of learning are in the writings of the Buddhist monk and scholar I-tsing. I-tsing travelled from China to India via Sumatra and back between 688–695 CE, taking numerous Sanskrit texts back to China, which he translated into Chinese. In his writings, I-tsing described Sriwijaya as a centre for studying both Buddhism and the Sanskrit language. He recorded that there were more than 1,000 monks studying and practicing. This brought Sriwijaya into the spotlight for monks as a place to study and train prior to traveling to India.³

An interesting connection between India and Sumatra is evident in a copper plate found at Nalanda. This ninth-century plate, issued by a Pala king of Bengal, is inscribed with a request from a Sumatran king of Sriwijaya requesting Indian villagers to support the monks and the monastery.

A four-armed Avalokiteshvara, probably from the Sriwijayan era but date unknown, graces the Negeri Museum in Jambi, Sumatra. The presence of this particular *bodhisattva* indicates that the Mahayana practices of great compassion and *bodhicitta* were established in Sumatra. Avalokiteshvara, known in Tibetan as Chenrezig, embodies the compassion of all the Buddhas. The awakening mind (*bodhicitta*) is based upon love and compassion for all beings equally; without it, there is no means to engage in the Mahayana practices.⁴

Muara Jambi and Beyond

From a Buddhist perspective, Muara Jambi is perhaps the most important archeological site in Sumatra, as it has the largest concentration of Buddhist remains. The temple complex of Muara Jambi lies around 26 kilometers from the present-day city of Jambi, located on the Batang Hari, the largest and longest river in Sumatra. The site of this extensive monastic university, which is considered to have been much larger than Nalanda, is approximately 20.63 kilometers in area, with 7.5 kilometers of Batang Hari River frontage. The site features an extensive system of at least seven man-made canals, which intersect the temples.

Only eight of the *candis* (temple buildings) have been restored, with an estimated eighty or more *menapos* (mounds of brick ruins). There are also ruins of what are possibly small temples or *stupas* of varying sizes, which are covered in vegetation. The *chandis* that have been restored are

Kedaton, Gedong 1 and Gedong 2, Gumpung, Tinggi 1 and Tinggi 2, Astano, and Kembar Batu.

Candi Gumpung is the largest and most significant. Built in the ninth and tenth centuries, it features a courtyard with an inner chamber and an elevated podium with niches, perhaps used as altars or for statues. Among the important finds from here are 20 sheets of inscribed gold plates that date from the ninth or tenth centuries. The inscriptions are written in Kawi script and include 22 names of tantric deities from the Vajradhatu mandala⁵ or the Triokavijaya mandala.⁶

Candi Gumpung features a statue of a *makara* (part elephant, fish and crocodile) protecting the temple at the base of the stairs. A Dvarapala statue, also a protector, was found here, too, as was the exquisite headless and armless image of Prajnaparamita that is now at the Muara Jambi Museum. The presence of this statue shows that the Prajnaparamita, the Buddha's teachings related to emptiness and *bodhicitta*, were present here. Her style is similar to that of the Singosari Prajnaparamita image found in East Java, which dates to around the 13th century.

The hill of Bukit Perak (Silver Hill), situated away from the other *candis*, is of particular interest. It has an unusual shape and has not yet been unexcavated. Pabongka Rinpoche states: "Guru Suvaradvipi (Dharmakirti Serlingpa) was in the Palace of the Silver Umbrella and he and Atisha Dipamkara shared the same sleeping quarters here."⁷ This suggests that the *candi* was Serlingpa's dwelling place, occupying the highest site at Muara Jambi, with the benefits of both the breeze and the isolation. Many local legends surround this site. Many other sites also remain to be excavated, partially hidden by jungle, in orchards of cacao and durian, plantations of palm oil and coconut, or on private land. Muara Jambi is listed with UNESCO as a potential World Heritage site, but the archeological site is precariously adjacent a large number of heavy industries, which pose a serious threat to both the future of Muara Jambi and Indonesia's cultural heritage.

In 1025, the Cholas from South India raided the ports of Sriwijaya, and in the 13th century Islam arrived, brought by Gujarati traders from western India. The Chola invasion coincided with the fall of the Majapahit Empire in Java and much of Sumatra, especially in the northern areas, and conversions to Islam. By the end of the 16th century, Islam had completely replaced Buddhism and Hinduism as the major religion throughout both Java and Sumatra.

Dharmakirti Serlingpa Suvarnavipi of Suvarnavipa

Little is known about Serlingpa and his life. He was purportedly born into a royal family in the early 11th century in Sumatra, probably Sriwijaya. He obtained a statue of Śakyamuni Buddha from a mountain cave. When his subjects made offerings and prayers before this statue, they had productive harvest and no plagues.⁸ Thus, Serlingpa led many in Suvarnavipa (Sumatra) to have faith in Lord Buddha.

Serlingpa, knowledgeable in both Sanskrit and Mahāyāna texts, went to India to further his studies and do pilgrimages to the Buddhist sites. He both studied and taught at Nalanda. It is thought that he remained there for seven years and studied under many masters. His extensive learning, wisdom, and insights became known throughout Asia. He was the author of several works relating to Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara* (The Bodhisattvas Way of Life), a guide to cultivating the mind of enlightenment, generating the qualities of compassion, loving-kindness, generosity and patience.

Dharmakirti Serlingpa was considered to be one of the most outstanding representatives of Mahayana philosophy of his time. Six works in the Tangyur (the commentaries by the great masters

of the Buddha's teachings) are accredited to him. The colophons of at least two important philosophical works of Atisha himself, the *Satya-dvaya-avattara* and the *Bodhicarya avatara-bhasya*, express direct inspiration as coming from the teachings of Serlingpa. Another is a huge treatise on Mahayana philosophy concerning the *Prajnaparamita*, with the colophon of the text stating 'it was composed in the city of Sriwijaya of Suvarnavipa and provide the name of a king, Cudamanivarman.'⁹

Atisha Dipamkara Srijnana

Atisha (982–1054) was born into a royal family in eastern Bengal. At the time of his birth auspicious signs were said to have manifested: a shower of flowers, multiple rainbows in the sky and sounds of celestial music. As a child he displayed qualities of devotion and compassion with a strong interest in the teachings of the Buddha. He had a special connection with Tara, the female deity of enlightened action, and she was to remain his tutelary deity throughout his life, both guiding and counseling him.

Atisha's first teacher was Jetari who gave him teachings on refuge and *bodhicitta*. He then went to Nalanda, filled with esteemed teachers and scholars, and studied there with many masters for eighteen years. He was ordained in Bodhgaya with the name Dipamkara Srijnana, "He Whose Deep Awareness Acts as a Lamp."

Atisha studied with 152 teachers, and was considered the crown jewel of Nalanda. Once, while circumambulating the *stupa* at Bodhgaya, Atisha had visions of Tara who told him that the most important practice for gaining enlightenment was the practice of *bodhicitta*, the altruistic wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

Dharmakirti Serlingpa of Suvarnavipa/Sumatra was reputed to have the most vast and profound realizations of *bodhicitta*, so at the age of 31, Atisha embarked on a voyage to Sumatra together with 125 fellow monks and a group of traders. The voyage took more than 13 months, and they encountered numerous obstacles, including monstrous and malevolent whales and huge storms, which Atisha was able to subdue through his prayers to Tara. After landing in Suvarnavipa, they approached six meditators who were students of Dharmakirti. The group stayed with these meditators for a fortnight to observe them and enquire about which tradition the great teacher followed.

When Serlingpa was informed of the arrival of Atisha and his group, he set out to meet them, leading a group of 525 monks to make offerings carried by two elephants. Atisha offered the *guru* a glass full of precious stones, foretelling that he would receive from Serlingpa Dharmakirti the complete instructions on training in the perfection of *bodhicitta*.

Like water poured from one vessel into another, Atisha received many profound teachings from his guru, including training the mind in *bodhicitta*, the practice of exchanging self and others (*tonglen*) and the mind training (*lojong*). Whenever Atisha spoke the name of Serlingpa, tears would fall down his cheeks.¹⁰

When twelve years had passed, Dharmakirti Serlingpa spoke to Dipamkara Atisha, saying "Go north to the Land of Snows." He foresaw that Atisha would have many disciples if he went to Tibet and benefit many beings there. In 1027, Atisha returned to India from Indonesia. He went first to Magadha, then to Bodhgaya, and finally Vikramasila Monastery. He quickly became renowned

throughout India for the brilliance of his teachings, his unparalleled skills in debating and his incredible depth of compassion and insight. It is said that he restored the purity of the Dharma in India wherever it had been corrupted or mistaken.

While still at Vikramasila, Atisha received an invitation from the king of Tibet, requesting him to come to his country to address the decline of Buddhism, due to schisms in religious belief, and restore the *vinaya* (the code of conduct for the ordained) within the monastic system. Atisha is said to have checked with both his tutelary deities, Chenrezig and Tara, who told him that it would be beneficial to go to Tibet, but that his lifespan would be shortened by 20 years.

Going North to the Land of Snows

As instructed by Serlingpa, Atisha went to Tibet, where he stayed for 17 years. He went first to Tholing in the area of Ngari, traveling with the translator Nagso and a group. In Ngari, Atisha was requested not to teach the most profound Dharma, but to teach the law of karma, cause and effect, because this would be most beneficial for the Tibetans. Atisha then composed the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment (Bodhipathaprabha)*. Though the text is brief, with only 62 verses, it had a tremendous impact on Buddhism in Tibet because it contained the essence of both the *sutras* and *tantras*. This work was Atisha's main accomplishment and became the model for the Lamrim (Graduated Path to Enlightenment) teachings.

Atisha spent three years in Ngari and then went on further pilgrimages, concluding his travels at Nyetang, south of Lhasa. Tara had told Atisha that an *upasaka* (a male Buddhist lay practitioner) would assist him. In Thöling, he finally met Dromtumpa, who was to become his closest and most important disciple. Together, they traveled throughout Tibet and arrived at Samye Monastery in 1047. In 1054, Atisha died there at the age of 72, as predicted by Tara, and his body was placed in a *stupa*.

Two years later Drompumpa founded Radreng Monastery, which became the first monastery of the Kadampa tradition. In the 15th century, the great Lama Tsongkapa reformed the school and named it Gelug ("lineage of virtue," sometimes called the Yellow Hat School). The Gelug tradition, still partly based on the older Kadam lineages, is associated with the Dalai Lamas. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama states, "The teachings that Atisha brought to Tibet were not only the pure teachings of the Buddha, but they had also been transmitted through an unbroken lineage, which could be traced back to Guru Shakyamuni himself."¹¹

Conclusion

This paper shows the profound influence that the great Indian master Atisha had throughout Southeast Asia and demonstrates the depth of connections between Mahayana Buddhism in India, Sumatra, and Tibet, from the early 7th century up to the 13th century. Most significantly, perhaps, it brings to light the hypothesis that Muara Jambi was indeed the site where Atisha traveled and remained for twelve years, studying under the renowned teacher Serlingpa Dharmakirti. From Sumatra, Atisha took the precious teachings he received, including the teachings on *bodhicitta*, to Tibet. The transmission of these teachings precipitated the resurgence of Buddhism in Tibet in the 11th century. Although the teachings faded from view in Sumatra, they remained intact in Tibet

until the 20th century, when they found their way to the West.

NOTES

¹ See Peter Skilling, “Dharmakirti’s Durbodhaloka and the Literature of Sriwijaya,” *Journal of the Siam Society* 85:1/2(1997) 185–94.

² George Coedes, *The Royaume de Çrīvijaya* (Paris: Bulletin de L’Ecole Francais Extreme Orient, 1918), pp. 1–36.

³ I-tsing (trans. J. Takakusu), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1896; Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1998), p. xxxiv.

⁴ Geshe Lhundub Sopa, *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), p. 4.

⁵ Boechari, *Ritual Deposits of Candi Gumpung (Muaro Jambi)* (Bangkok: SPAFA Report, Consultative Workshop on Archeological and Environmental Studies on Sriwijaya, 1985).

⁶ M. Nihom, *The Mandala of Candi Gumpung and the Indo-Tibetan Vajrasekharatantra*, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41:3(1998).

⁷ Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), p. 57. For more details on the life of Atisha, see Dharmakaranama Gurugana, *Biography of Atisha* (Bangkok: Social Science Association, 1974).

⁸ Sarat Chandra Das, *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow* (Calcutta. India. Sri Satguru Publications, 1893), p. 86.

⁹ Skilling , “Dharmakirti’s Durbodhaloka,” pp. 187-94.

¹⁰ Thubten Jinpa, *Mind Training: The Great Collection* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), p. 9.

¹¹ His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Transformed Mind: Reflections on Truth, Love and Happiness* (Great Britain. Hodder and Stoughton, 2001).

What is Borobudur?

Hudaya Kandahjaya

The question “What is Borobudur?” has been asked ever since Borobudur was rediscovered two centuries ago. But the answers of previous studies are unsatisfactory and conflicting. De Casparis summed it up by saying that, despite knowing many details, we lack a holistic comprehension of Borobudur.

This study attempts to address this problem by isolating the evidence and identifying relevant sources.¹ This enables us to determine the underlying rationale and design that the architects deployed in constructing Borobudur. This scheme assists us in understanding the symbolism and function of Borobudur laid out by the architects.

This study confirms that the *San Hyang Kamahāyānikan* (SHK) provided the ultimate inspiration; King Samaratunga and his daughter, Princess Prāmodavarddhanī, perfected the architecture; and the Kayumwungan inscription consecrated Borobudur on May 26 in the year 824 CE. As we can see today, Borobudur is architecturally a *stūpa* on an altar (*stūpa-prāsāda*) and memorializes the eight miraculous events in the life of Śākyamuni. This sanctum of the Vajradhāra (Old Javanese: Kabajradharan) school is a *mandala* representing a Dharma realm (*dharmadhātumandala*) and displaying the path to unexcelled enlightenment. As such, this monastery (*vihāra*) is imbued with the multitude of virtues of a *sugata* (*sugatagunagana*), based upon which the builders, supporters, and practitioners could accumulate virtues (*bhūmisambhāra*) to speedily accomplish perfect enlightenment. This temple is, therefore, called an excellent Buddha image, or Borobudur (Sanskrit: *vara-buddha-rūpa*; Sinhalese: *wara-budu-r*).

Understanding Borobudur

The main obstacle that prevents us from understanding Borobudur comes from the fact that we have inherited this monument without any documentation. The situation has led scholars into endless debates disputing all aspects of Borobudur. Naturally, no one could claim the final word unless the argument is corroborated by evidence.

Lacking direct comprehensive written evidence does not mean that evidence does not exist. Instead, we must realize that we have two sets of evidence. The first is the so-called contemporary or near-contemporary evidence,² which may serve as a proxy for gaining access to this mute sanctum. The second requires us to acknowledge that Borobudur was not built out of nothing; designers and builders must have systematically worked with specific ingredients to produce Borobudur.³ Thus, despite the static structure that we see today, the dynamic nature of the sanctum can be seen as embedded in the edifice, because the whole structure has clearly undergone a number of successive processes to arrive at its final form.

In 1885, J. W. Ijzerman accidentally discovered the so-called hidden foot of Borobudur. It contains 160 panels of reliefs that were photographed by Kassian Cephas in 1890-1891. Later, the restoration team discovered a lotus pedestal for a large *stūpa* beneath the circular terraces. This hidden formation was apparently abandoned by the architects. This also simultaneously suggests that modifications or adjustments were part of the process of constructing Borobudur. Most likely, the architects themselves made this particular architectural alteration. This alteration is significant

because it offers a substantial clue as to how and why Borobudur was constructed and the scheme the architects employed in building it.

Layers of Conception

Two pieces of evidence from the concealed base provide us with additional information. The first is the term *caityavandana*, which is chiselled on the top of one panel relief. This term, along with the relief sculpture associated with it and the thousands of clay *stūpikās* inscribed with an abbreviated form of the formula *om ye te svāhā*, which was unearthed from the grounds of Borobudur,⁴ reveal the religious practices and beliefs of the Javanese who lived in the environs of Borobudur. It shows that at that time, the Javanese understood the concept of *dharmakāya-caitya* (or *-stūpa*; these terms are interchangeable). This concept has two important implications. First, the construction of such a *stūpa* does not necessarily entail the presence of relics. Second, the production or offering of such a *stūpa* is conceived as renewing the propagation of the Dharma, as well as the accumulation of merit and knowledge, an understanding of the law of causation, and the opportunity to view or have a vision of the Buddha.⁵ While these implications are obvious from the beginning, the evidence boosts them further. The architects of Borobudur were clearly familiar with the proper procedures for constructing a *stūpa* or *caitya*.

The architects' familiarity with *stūpa* construction is confirmed by the abandoned *stūpa* pedestal hidden underneath the circular terraces. If we strip away the modifications at the bottom and at the top of Borobudur and visualize the earlier design, it becomes clear that the architects initially attempted to build a large *stūpa* on top of Borobudur. The wall at the base was to be sculpted with reliefs displaying the *Karmavibhanga Sūtra*. This *sūtra* says that such a *stūpa* is to commemorate the four essential events in the life of the Buddha. The original design of Borobudur was in line with the standard guidelines of *stūpa* design and basically followed an Indian architectural prototype called the *kūtāgāra-prāsāda* (or *stūpa-prāsāda*, following the term used in the SHK).⁶

Yet, because the final form of Borobudur does not exactly follow the standard arrangement, the architects must have felt compelled to adjust the composition to conform to a more ideal design. For example, the collection of thousands of votive *stūpas* from the Borobudur yard is dominated by a form that has an elongated dome (technically called *aṇḍa*) with eight subsidiary *stūpikās* around it.⁷ This dominant set gives us a hint of what the architects had in mind. Most likely, they were fascinated by the concept of fostering the production of votive *stūpas* with eight subsidiary *stūpikās*. The production of such votive *stūpa* sets is linked to religious practices commemorating eight miraculous events of Śākyamuni's earthly life and to a set of eight *stūpa* configurations corresponding to those events.⁸ If we then compare these eight *stūpa* configurations with the final form of Borobudur, we find close correlations. Thus, the architects managed to integrate all eight *stūpas* into a single harmonious *stūpa* structure.

But the price paid for that accomplishment was dear. The second piece of evidence from the hidden base indicates that some of the panels were not just left unfinished; some were also intentionally obliterated. This suggests that some people attempted to damage the panels. These destructive actions could be interpreted as evidence of animosity toward intended changes in the architectural design.⁹

Evidence from the Kayumwungan Narratives

This analysis accords with a narrative expressed in some verses of the Kayumwungan inscription.¹⁰ A new translation of these verses allows us to amplify the correlations and demonstrate that the Kayumwungan inscription was most likely the original one from the consecration of Borobudur on May 26, 824.

Verses 6 to 8 of this inscription hint at an incident leading to a mitigation that can be linked with modifications to the architectural plan. Verse 6 informs us that a broad attachment to the *maṇḍala* was considered to be nontraditional and, therefore, its construction was likely brought to a sudden halt.¹¹ In Verse 8, the inscription continues, recording that Princess Prāmodavarddhanī, the most beloved daughter (of King Samaratunga), built in this multitude an “abode of the *jina*” (*jinālaya*), being the spoke of an altar formed like a wheel. The layout of the perforated *stūpas* on top of the three circular terraces of Borobudur is imaginatively similar to the spokes of a wheel. From the perspective of *stūpa* construction, the *jinālaya* parallels the construction of the *stūpa* of the Victorious One,¹² as does the term *tathāgatabhūmi*, out of which the name Bhūmisambhāra was created.¹³ The second quarter (*pada*) of Verse 8 tells us that King Samaratunga made the lower part of the monument larger, adding levels that increased the monument’s size ten-fold. Indeed, if we count from these additional levels up to the main *stūpa*, Borobudur has ten stories altogether.

The Kayumwungan inscription praises Princess Prāmodavarddhanī for performing the actions of a Buddha (*uddhacarita*). Since we can ascertain that *uddhacarita* is identical to *buddhacārya*, we are able to fully appreciate the full extent of its meaning when the SHK describes these actions thus:¹⁴

This *bodhi*, rising from *samādhi*, all *mudras*, and *tathāgatas*,
The ultimate secret sown, are to be known by one of wisdom and *buddhacārya*.

The meaning of this passage is: The teaching on enlightenment, *samādhi*, and all *mudrās* are to be possessed by you. Further, you should constantly meditate on the *tathāgata*, and this *paramaguhya tathāgata* is indeed to be known by one of wisdom and *buddhacārya*; *mahābodhi*, *samādhi*, all *mudra-mantra-yoga-bhāvanā*, and wisdom are the bodies of the four Devīs: Locanā, Pāndaravāsini, Māmakī, and Tārā. The four Devīs should be known as such; do not be inattentive. They are as pure as Bhatāra Hyan Buddha. If these four *devīs* are found they are to be embodied by the Yogīśvara.

We can further attest that *buddhacārya* is equivalent to *bhadracarī*, the actions of the Buddha. Śāntideva and Atiśa praised the *bhadracarī* as being the source of the Supreme Worship (*anuttarapūjā*).¹⁵ This equivalence is very important for explaining the monument, since the entire *bhadracarī* is depicted at Borobudur. One of the panels displays a performance of *anuttarapūjā*, while another shows how the Javanese of Borobudur practiced liberating living beings. Knowledge about the *anuttarapūjā* is corroborated by the living tradition of the Balinese, who preserve a recension of this liturgy.

From the definition of the four goddesses (*caturdevī*) mentioned earlier – Locanā, Pāndaravāsini, Māmakī, and Tārā – it is clear that they are identified with *mahābodhi*, *samādhi*, all

mudrās, mantras, yoga, bhāvanā, and wisdom, or, in other words, with *buddhacārya* and wisdom. Thus, those four goddesses are not female deities, as the word goddess may suggest, but embodiments of the conduct of the Buddha and of wisdom. As such, no depiction of these goddesses in female form has ever been found at Borobudur.

Memorializing the Buddha’s Life and Qualities

In general, apart from the details, we can determine that the architects of Borobudur built the *stūpa-prāsāda* to memorialize the eight miraculous events in Śākyamuni’s life and to represent the body of the Tathāgata (*dharmadhātu*),¹⁶ imbued with a multitude of virtues. In the Kayumwungan inscription, the architects named it the Lord of All Virtues (Śrī Ghananātha).¹⁷ Having such a sanctum, builders, supporters, and practitioners could accumulate the virtues needed to speedily accomplish the perfect enlightenment. For this reason, this temple is also known as “an excellent Buddha image,” or Borobudur.

NOTES

¹ This short paper cannot describe all the aspects of Borobudur that I have accumulated in the course of my ongoing research on this monument. However, here I attempt to line up some critical insights and understandings that have evolved out of my investigations. I wish to elaborate on all these in the near future. In the meantime I would like to thank Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo and her editing team for straightening and making this paper become more legible.

² J. G. de Casparis suggested “contemporary or near-contemporary evidence” in place of “direct evidence,” see J. G. de Casparis, “The Dual Nature of Barabudur,” in Luis Gomez and Hiram W. Woodward, Jr., eds., *Barabudur: History and Significance of a Buddhist Monument* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981), 47.

³ Today we certainly could imagine that stone materials, laborers, artisans, tools, ideas, etc., were some of the main ingredients. But, of course, one cannot just mix those ingredients up.

⁴ In a way, this paragraph is a summary of discussion related to this evidence in my forthcoming article (Hudaya Kandahjaya, “San Hyan Kamahāyānikan, Borobudur, and the Origins of Esoteric Buddhism in Indonesia,” in Andrea Acri, ed., *Esoteric Buddhism in Maritime Asia* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2015).

⁵ See Giuseppe Tucci, *Stupa: Art, Architectonics and Symbolism* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), pp. 28–32.

⁶ See Hudaya Kandahjaya, “The Lord of All Virtues,” *Pacific World*, 3rd Series, 11(2009) 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3–5.

⁸ See Pema Dorjee, *Stūpa and Its Technology: A Tibeto-Buddhist Perspective* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Motilal Banarsidass, 1996), pp. 61-71.

⁹ See Hudaya Kandahjaya, *A Study on the Origin and Significance of Borobudur*, Ph.D. diss. (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 2004), p. 135.

¹⁰ For this correspondence, we owe a great deal to J. G. de Casparis whose intuition made him the first to link this stone inscription to Borobudur. Despite a number of objections against his translation and interpretation, also the mysterious provenance of the inscription, de Casparis himself remained steadfast as to the value of this contemporary evidence for the purpose of explaining the whole meaning of Borobudur.

¹¹ The “broad attachment” (*vistīrsn̄nasanga*) is in a damaged part of the Kayumwungan inscription, so that we cannot be absolutely certain as to which it refers. However, this broad attachment may be either related to the remains of the lotus pedestal, or the intent to change it into layers of circular terraces, or even the broad base that covers the hidden foot of Borobudur.

¹² There are eight types of *stūpa* configuration. They are of two categories: four commemorating the essential moments of Śākyamuni’s earthly life and four commemorating some of his most famous miracles (Tucci 1988:24). One of these eight is called the *stūpa* of Victor. A fascinating feature of this *stūpa* of Victor is that the prescription for building it requires three circular steps. This requirement corresponds with the three circular terraces of Borobudur.

¹³ The name Bhūmisambhāra – inscribed in the Tri Tepusan inscription dated to 832 – led de Casparis to connect this name to Borobudur. J. G. de Casparis, *Prasasti Indonesia I: Inscripties uit de Çailendra-tijd* (n.p.: Bandung, 1950), p. 167. By introducing the word *bhūdhara* to create a hypothetical name “Bhūmisambhāra-bhūdhara,” de Casparis (ibid.:169, 202) reconstructs the meaning Bhūmisambhāra as: “De Berg van het verwerven (van vrome verdiensten) (op de tien) stadia (van de ontwikkeling van de Bodhisattva),” or the “Mountain of Accumulation of Virtue on the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva.” However, it is more likely that the poet of the Tri Tepusan inscription took it from the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, chap. 15, “Indriyeśvara”: *tathāgatabhūmisambhārajñānāni*.

¹⁴ *Eva bodhisamadyotta sarbvamudrātathāgata, suguhyatopitajñeyo buddhacāryyavicakanai. Ka: Ika kājaran i bodhi samādhi mva ika sarbvamudrā pinakalakaanta mva ika tathāgata inaēn-aēnta, mva ika paramaguhya tathāgata niyata ikā kavruhana de sa buddhacāryyavicakaa, ka, ika mahābodhi, ika samādhi, ika sarbvamudrā mantra yoga bhāvanā mva kavicakaan ya tikāvak ni caturdevī Locanā, Pāaravāsini, Māmakī, Tārā. Iti caturdevī kavruhana hayva tan prayatna, paa pavitranira mva bhaāra hya Buddha yan ta kapagih pāvahnira caturdevī de sa yogīśvara* Jacob Kats, *Sang hyang Kamahâyânikan: Oud-Javaansche tekst, met inleiding, vertaling en aanteeekeningen*. (’s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1910), pp. 69–70. *Eva bodhisamadyotta sarbvamudrātathāgata, suguhyatopitajñeyo buddhacāryyavicak anai . Ka: Ika kājaran i bodhi samādhi mva ika sarbvamudrā pinakalak a anta mva ika tathāgata ina ēn-a ēnta, mva ika paramaguhya tathāgata niyata ikā kavruhana de sa buddhacāryyavicak a a, ka, ika mahābodhi,*

ika samādhi, ika sarbvamudrā mantra yoga bhāvanā mva kavicak a an ya tikāvak ni caturdevī Locanā, Pā aravāsinī, Māmakī, Tārā. Iti caturdevī kavruhana hayva tan prayatna, pa a pavitranira mva bha āra hya Buddha yan takapa gih pāvaknira caturdevī de sa yogīśvara.

¹⁵ See Cecil Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse, *Śikshā-samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine* (London: John Murray, 1922), pp. 264–65, 269; Richard Sherburne, *The Complete Works of Atīśa* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000), p. 43. I have discussed a possibility of linking of Atīśa to Borobudur in Hudaya Kandahjaya, “Revisiting Ādi Buddha and Tantric Doxography,” in Radha Banerjee Sarkar, et al, eds., *Souvenir of Seventh International Alexander Csoma de Kőrös Symposium on Buddhist Transcreations in Tibetan Literature and Art* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2014), pp. 190-218.v.

¹⁶ I first suggested *dharmadhātu* in 1995 (see Hudaya Kandahjaya, *The Master Key for Reading Borobudur Symbolism* (Bandung: Yayasan Penerbit Karaniya, 1995), p. 3. The concept becomes much clearer later, when the *stūpa* can be perceived as the whole body of the Tathāgata (see Kandahjaya, “The Lord of All Virtues,” p. 10), or as a *dharmakāya-caitya*, as mentioned previously.

¹⁷ See Kandahjaya, “The Lord of All Virtues.”

The Kammavibhanga Reliefs: Searching for Their Moral and Social Value

Kustiani

The reliefs of Borobudur temple express thousands of moral and social values. These values are depicted in 2,672 reliefs that appear on three major levels of the building of the temple, representing the desire realm (*kammadhatu*), the form realm (*rūpadhatu*), and the formless realm (*arūpadhatu*). Literary texts such as the *Kammavibhanga*, *Jātakamala*, *Avadana*, *Gandavyuha*, and *Bhadracari* are the basis for the carvings on these reliefs. However, the stories that were chosen as the basis for carving the reliefs cannot be separated from the views of the Javanese people who lived at that time.

The reliefs that appear on the *kammadhatu* base, located in the foundation or first floor of the temple, are called the Kammavibhanga reliefs. These reliefs consist of 160 panels that teach the law of *kamma*. Unfortunately only four panels can still be seen at this time. Another 156 panels have been covered with stone in order to strengthen the foundation of the temple.¹ It was necessary to build the stone that covers up the temple, which prevents us from viewing the rest of the Kammavibhanga relief, because the foundation of the temple becomes fragile periodically. Another theory is that the Kammavibhanga reliefs were covered up because they contain sexual imagery, which some considered to be vulgar.

In 1885, Borobudur Temple was restored by a team led by the German archaeologist J. W. Ijerman.² Before this restoration effort, the Kammavibhanga reliefs were not well-known to scholars and the public. After the restoration was complete, however, the reliefs were again covered with stone in order to strengthen the foundation of the temple.

What is the real meaning of the name of Kammavibhanga? An etymological analysis of the word is helpful: *kamma* means “action” and *vibhanga* means “the wave of life.”³ Another definition of the word *vibhanga* appears in the dictionary of Pali Text Society: “distribution, division, distinction, classification.” Based on these two definitions, the word *kammavibhanga* can be understood to mean either “the wave of life based on the law of *kamma*,” or “divisions of the law of *kamma*.” These definitions both accord with the reliefs that have been carved in the Kammavibhanga panels, where 160 reliefs attempt to explain the wave of life based on the law of *kamma* and also the divisions of *kamma*.

The content of the Kammavibhanga reliefs can be understood by walking around Borobudur Temple in a clockwise direction, starting in the east, moving south, then west, and ending in the north. The first Kammavibhanga relief shows people catching fish and a dead body. This relief expresses a number of moral values and portray social conditions of the Javanese people in the eighth century. The depiction of fishermen shows that fishing was one occupation of the people. Certain images of society at that time demonstrate that unity and solidarity were highly valued. One image carved into the relief shows people caring for the sick. Another portrays the tradition of people gathered together, hand in hand, to perform a cremation.

The teachings that were the inspiration for carving the Kammavibhanga relief open up many questions and controversies for Buddhist scholars. For example, some believe that the Kammavibhanga reliefs are related to the *Kammavibhanga Sutta*, which has been preserved in both Sanskrit and Chinese. Others believe that they are based on both the *Kammavibhanga Sutta* and the daily lives of the Javanese in the eighth century.⁴

The Kammavibhanga Reliefs and the *Suttas*

In this section, I would like to discuss the *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* and the *Māhakammavibhanga Sutta*⁵ and explore whether or not there is a connection between these texts and the Kammavibhanga reliefs of Borobudur. If a connection can be established, it may indicate that the *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* and *Māhakammavibhanga Sutta* were sources for the teachings portrayed in carvings on the Kammavibhanga reliefs.

The *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* was spoken by the Buddha at Savathi. A *brahmin* named Subha asked the Buddha what causes differences among people. The *brahmin* questioned why some people are rich while others are poor, some people are sick while others are very healthy, some people are cruel while others are kind. The Buddha answered his question by saying that “All beings are the inheritors of their own actions (*kamma*).” In clarifying his answer, the Buddha explained that a short life and sickness are caused by torturing and killing living beings. Poverty is caused by taking what is not given.

The *Mahākammavibhanga Sutta* was taught by the Buddha when he was living at Rajagaha. This discourse begins with a conversation between a monk named Samidhi and an ascetic from Pataliputta. The ascetic from Pataliputta asked Samidhi, “Are actions of thought and speech insignificant and only physical actions real?” The question was a matter of dispute for both of them. Finally, Samidhi asked the ascetic from Pataliputta to take the question to the Buddha. The Buddha explained that regardless of whether actions are created by the body, speech, or mind, unwholesome actions bring suffering, and only wholesome actions bring happiness. Based on this explanation, the main teaching of the *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* and the *Māhakammavibhanga Sutta* is the law of cause and effect (*kamma*). One will always reap the consequences of whatever deeds one has done. Good actions will bring good results, including happiness.

The central topic of the *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* and the *Māhakammavibhanga Sutta* is same as the central topic of Kammavibhanga reliefs. Both are concerned with the teachings about *kamma*. Hence, it can be said that the Kammavibhanga reliefs intend to illustrate the same teachings about *kamma* that are explained in the Buddhist texts. The Kammavibhanga reliefs are rich in moral and social values, illustrating and teaching the people about the law of *kamma*. Evidence of this can be seen in some of the images shown on the reliefs.

Moral Values in the Kammavibhanga Reliefs

Many scenes in the Kammavibhanga reliefs teach moral values and seem intended to increase the spiritual awareness of the people. One example is a scene depicted in relief number 36. This relief shows two scenes, one in which people are quarreling and another of rebirth in hell. The moral is that if people engage in arguing, fighting, and promoting war, they will be reborn in hell in the next life. In hell, they will always be pushed into quarrels, fight with other, and find no time to rest. If they attempt to break away from the fighting, a bird will bite their head and push them back into the fray. Their whole life will be completely spent in quarreling and fighting.

The moral teaching that is conveyed in this relief is that people should refrain from fighting and quarreling, which will result in a life of discord; subsequently, happiness will not be gained. A thorough study will reveal that many more moral values are embedded in the relief panels.

Social Values

Social values are also taught in the Kammavibhanga reliefs. The values depicted are not only for the betterment of the people's moral conduct, but also for the betterment of their social awareness. An example is relief number 19, which shows people taking care of the sick by giving them massages. It also depicts women cooking food. Thus, it teaches people to care for the sick not only by giving them massage, but also by providing food. Another social teaching is depicted in an image of bellows. In this relief, people are taught to work together for the good of society. It also depicts people building a house together. Hopefully, these images make people more aware that cooperation is to be treasured in society. Up to the present day, this tradition, called *sambatan*, has been preserved by the Javanese.

Based on the examples discussed above, we can conclude that the Kammavibhanga reliefs at Borobudur Temple are intended to convey teachings about *kamma*, and that they are also rich in moral and social values. They teach that not only will people who engage in immoral actions be born in hell, but in this life, people who are socially unaware will not be able to live harmoniously in society.

A more thorough study of the Kammavibhanga reliefs is still needed. Another important task that lies ahead is to take high-quality professional photographs of the four Kammavibhanga reliefs located on the first level of the Borobudur complex and the 156 reliefs housed in Museum Kammavibhanga for the benefit of Buddhist scholars.

NOTES

¹ The entire set of reliefs was photographed before the panels were covered up. The photographs are stored in the on-site Kammavibhanga Museum of Borobudur temple.

² Rudi dan Nurhadi Rangkuti Banil, ed., *Rahasia di Kaki Borobudur* (The Hidden Foot of Borobudur) (Jakarta: Katalis, 1992), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵ Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Middle Length Discourse of the Buddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1995).

Ruwat-Rawat Borobudur: An Annual Cultural Event that Celebrates Diversity and Multiculturalism

Wilis Rengganiasih Endah Ekowati

Magelang Regency, where the Borobudur Temple Compounds¹ are located, is rich in the local traditions of rituals, festivals, and local beliefs (i.e., legends and myths). It is also the home of over 30 varieties of traditional performing arts or folk arts (*kesenian rakyat*) and more than 2,000 folk art groups.² In Borobudur District, where the majority of the people are Muslim, a few indigenous practices passed down through generations still flourish. Unfortunately, this rich aspect of the people's cultural lives has not yet been integrated in the temple's conservation and management project.

Studies on the preservation and management of Borobudur Temple as a world cultural heritage site show that there are still many problems yet to be solved.³ These include concerns about the neglect of the cultural landscape (the local term is *saujana*), the living traditions, and the poverty of the local inhabitants. The local communities still have little or no opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of managing Borobudur, even though any decisions that are made have an impact, directly or indirectly, on their lives.

Ruwat-Rawat Borobudur (sometimes referred to as Ruwatan Borobudur) is a cultural event that was initiated out of a concern for the desacralization of Borobudur Temple, the exploitation of the temple for the sake of tourist consumption, and the marginalization of the cultural landscape, living traditions, and economic lives of local communities. In this paper, I will show that this cultural event contributes to the preservation of the Borobudur Temple Compounds as a world cultural heritage site, especially in accommodating and celebrating the diversity and multiculturalism of the communities surrounding the temple.

Sucoro and Warung Info Jagad Cleguk

Sucoro was one of the villagers in the Borobudur Sub-district forced to leave their lands and all its history and memories, when the Borobudur Temple archaeological park was constructed in early 1980. Since then, he and his fellow villagers have been struggling against a multitude of issues caused by the preservation and management system of Borobudur Temple. People often come to his food stall (*warung*), not to buy food or drink initially, but to hang out (*nongkrong*).⁴ They exchange information, discuss ideas, and share their concerns about different issues. Warung Info Jagad Cleguk (WIJC), a non-government organization (NGO), was born out of these *nongkrong* activities. According to Sucoro, this NGO has served as an information center and site of struggle for him and his fellows since February 7, 2003.

For Sucoro and the WIJC, the most important item on the agenda is to raise people's awareness about the values of Borobudur Temple as a cultural heritage site. Since the preservation project began, Borobudur has been transformed from a living Buddhist temple into a dead monument. In the process, the project has sacrificed the temple's sacredness and intimate relationship with the neighboring villagers, and shut down the multicultural activities that took place in the past. Sucoro has witnessed people of different faiths using the temple as a sacred sanctuary for ritual practices. He says that people make offerings, meditate, and make prayers or aspirations

with the hope of getting a job, promotion, prosperous life, or even offspring.

Since the management of the Borobudur Temple Compounds was assigned to a company called PT Taman, under Presidential Decree No. 1/1992,⁵ the focus has shifted away from preserving the temple to manipulating it for the tourism industry. As a state-owned company, PT Taman aims to make a profit from the management of the temple.⁶ Sucoro suggests that only through education can the preservation of Borobudur Temple be accomplished. The sacredness of the temple can be restored when people are more aware of the values it represents. He believes that the temple compound integrates and reflects valuable philosophical ideals, religious teachings, artistic motifs, archaeology, cultural elements, and technology that are still valuable and relevant to people's lives today. In order to carry out his aspiration to preserve these priceless treasures, Sucoro expresses his love and care for traditional performing arts and cultural activities, which he understands as a suitable way to respond to the neglect of the cultural lives of the people living in areas surrounding the temple.

Ruwat-Rawat Borobudur: An Annual Cultural Event

One of the projects initiated by Sucoro and WIJC is an annual cultural event called Rurwat-Rawat Borobudur (RRB). The terms *ruwat* and *rawat* suggest a concern for the well-being of the temple compound, in and of itself – not for any other agenda, such as tourism. In Javanese tradition, *ruwat* or *ruwatan* refers to an ancient cleansing ritual that is said to free a person from bad luck or an unfortunate destiny. Sucoro uses the term *ruwat* to remind people about the dangers of greed. Despite the broadcast slogan of preservation and the stated intention to contribute to the national income by means of the tourism industry, the fact that Borobudur Temple has been exploited for economic gain is a taint that needs to be cleansed. This impure intention, arising from greed, needs to be purified, both in the minds of human beings and in national institutions,⁷ so that the temple can be maintained (*rawat*) in a careful, caring, holistic way that considers the interconnections that link the temple with the cultural landscape and the local community. The ritual intends to alter the degradation that has been happening to the temple, so that the temple can return to its early condition as a sacred sanctuary.

The name of the event, RRB, suggests the importance of embracing the Borobudur Temple preservation project through the spirit of ritual. Ritual practices have the power to alter the nature of practitioners, places, and events. The ritual intends to alter the degradation that has been happening to the temple, so that the temple can return to its early status as a sacred sanctuary. Paranormals, religious leaders, cultural activists, and artists always serve on the front lines of the rituals that are held during the RRB event. These ritual activities are also seen in the cultural performances that are performed at the opening and closing ceremonies of the RRB. Usually the organizers collaborate with villagers to prepare offerings, which are brought to certain spots that are considered to be sacred. The offerings and the act of offering are both actual and symbolic, even theatrical. But other rituals, including the *sedhekah* Kedhung Winong (Kedhung Winong offering),⁸ *sedhekah* Gunung Wukir (Gunung Wukir offering),⁹ *sedhekah* Punthuk Setumbu (Punthuk Setumbu offering),¹⁰ and Umbul Donga (offering prayer) are not theatrical; instead, they are actual and symbolic. These rituals are part of WIJC's effort to restore indigenous practices and to preserve the local wisdom of the communities' ancestors. The agenda to restore ancient cultural practices is partly

intended to foster the people's love and respect for their ancestors and the environment, and also to give them a sense of their roots, solidarity, and interconnection with the natural world.

RRB was first held in May 2003 and the event has been held once a year ever since, with the number of participants and different activities increasing each year. The first RRB only lasted for a week, and it kept developing. In the last two years, the RRB has lasted for two months, from April 16 to June 16. Programs do not take place every day; rather, the agenda is contingent on the availability of resources, for example, funding,¹¹ facilitators, venues, and participants.¹² As a grassroots cultural event, the RRB is not rigidly programmed in terms of its management, schedule, number of participants, and types of activities. It allows room for negotiation, delays, cancellations, and additions to the main programs.¹³

The local communities, folk art groups in the Magelang Regency, and people from different regions and backgrounds participate in different activities, including rituals, workshops, cultural performances, cultural dialogues, performing arts, and seminars. The RRB 2013 added a *topeng ireng* festival (masked folk dance) to the program and the RRB 2014 included a folk art festival. The venue for the event has shifted among different locations, including Sucoro's house, the Borobudur Temple parking lot, local villages, hotels, halls in local village districts and sub-districts, and the park area of the temple. On the final day of the event, all participants dress in colorful costumes, mostly wearing folk art costumes, then take part in a parade to the grounds of Borobudur Temple. In RRB 2013, the parade involved approximately 100 performing arts groups. Everyone who participated in the parade observed silence for about five minutes, while they contemplated or prayed in accordance with their own religious traditions or belief systems, expressing their care and concern for the temple and their hopes that the temple will be respected as a religious or spiritual sanctuary, as it was in earlier times. After the period of silence, folk art groups performed in different areas of the temple park.

Sucoro and WIJC have faced challenges and criticism. They have also received support from different parties regarding the importance of the event. These challenges, criticism, and support have come from various institutions, groups, and individuals with different interests related to the temple. Sucoro received offers of funding for the event from a number of political parties when general elections were about to take place. Criticism comes from individuals who work at the tourism department of the Magelang Regency who, according to Sucoro, do not like the fact the RRB has managed to elicit the participation of many folk art groups, despite its lack of strong and stable funding. Sucoro, WIJC, and RRB have not only attracted the attention of groups and individuals at the grassroots, but also of those in positions of power, for example, the Deputy Minister of Education and Culture, the governor of Central Java, and the Commission X DPR RI (the Indonesian House of Representatives).¹⁴

RRB encourages the local communities and folk art groups to counter the commercialization of Borobudur Temple with acts of devotion and service. All the groups who participate in the event fund their own cultural activities and performances with what is called *swadaya*, or self-support. These villagers, who are mostly farmers, collect money to pay the transportation expenses of their folk art groups in order to support the RRB. The event has been successful in providing local communities with a forum for gathering and communicating, as well as opportunities for exhibiting their folk arts and stimulating their creativity. It both accommodates and celebrates diversity and multiculturalism as an inseparable part of the magnificent Borobudur.

Conclusion

The secularization of the temple by the government and the profit orientation of the government-owned corporation involved in the preservation project have created an ever-increasing gap between this internationally acclaimed Buddhist temple and the poverty of the people who live in the surrounding vicinity. Educating people and raising awareness about the importance of Borobudur is at the heart of the agenda of RRB, which has become a powerful movement of the people. The event is held, without any support from the Indonesian government, to help transform the temple from its current status as a dead monument into a priceless living monument for future generations. It attempts to rebuild relationships among the local communities, the living culture of today, and the ancient sacredness of the temple by accommodating and celebrating the diverse and multicultural character of the local communities. After twelve years of successfully holding the RRB, a question remains as to whether the event will continue, considering that the WIJC does not have stable funding and that Sucoro, the driving force behind the event, will one day leave this life.

NOTES

¹ The Borobudur Temple Compounds include the Borobudur, Mendut, and Pawon Temples.

² WIJC data from 2009 identify 36 distinctive folk arts and 2840 folk art groups in Magelang Regency.

³ Devi Rosa Kausar, "Rethinking the Role of World Heritage Sites in Development Cases of Cultural Sites in Indonesia and Cambodia," Academic Network for Development in Asia Discussion Paper Series, 2009, www2.gsid.nagoya-u.ac.jp/blog/anda/publications/anda-discussion-paper-series; Sara Guagnini "Borobudur *Saujana*: As Far As You Can See," International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) Newsletter No. 69, Autumn 2014; and LIPI, Balai Konservasi Borobudur, PT Taman Candi Borobudur, Prambanan dan Ratu Boko, dan Warung Info Jagad Cleguk, "Hasil Lokakarya Pengelolaan Cagar Budaya Borobudur," May 28, 2014.

⁴ Alexandra Crosby studied *nongkrong* as a research method and a strategy for creating cultural activism in her dissertation "Festivals in Java: Localizing Cultural Activism and Environmental Politics, 2005-2010." Alexandra Crosby, "Festivals in Java: Localizing Cultural Activism and environmental Politics, 2005-2010," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Technology, Sydney, 2013.

⁵ PT Taman refers to Taman Wisata Candi Borobudur, Prambanan, and Ratu Boko, Ltd. This state-owned company is responsible for managing Borobudur Temple Recreation Park, Prambanan Temple Recreation Park, and Ratu Boko Temple Recreation Park. Presidential Decree No. 1/1992 declares that the company has the right to manage tourism and recreational activities at these temples and parks. The Presidential Decree assigns the management of Borobudur Temple into three zones: Zone 1 is assigned to Balai Konservasi, which is responsible for preserving the temple; Zone 2 is assigned to PT Taman; and Zone 3 is managed by the local government.

⁶ Kausar, “Rethinking the Role of World Heritage Sites,” op cit; Sucoro, interview, June 7, 2013; LIPI, et al, “Hasil Lokakarya Pengelolaan,” op cit.

⁷ David Loy uses the term “institutionalized greed” in his analysis from a Buddhist perspective, based on the three roots, explaining how human greed has been institutionalized and carried out by multinational corporations that have had a huge impact on people’s lives. David R. Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” *Journal of the American Academic of Religion* 65:2(1997) 275-90.

⁸ A *kedhung* (Javanese) is an area of deeper water of a river and *Winong* is the name of the *kedhung*. Kedhung Winong is part of the Kali Praga (Praga River). Sedhekah Kedhung Winong is an offering that expresses the gratitude of the villagers to the river, as it provide rocks for them to make living. In addition, the offering is intended as a prayer for the villagers’ well-being (*slamet*) and for the conservation of the river.

⁹ Gunung Wukir is the name of a mountain where a Hindu temple, Candi Wukir, is located. The offering is part of an effort to preserve the temple and to promote unity and harmony among the villagers.

¹⁰ A *punthuk* (Javanese) is the higher part of a piece of land or a hill. Setumbu is the name of this *punthuk*. The offering is intended to promote the preservation of the Punthuk Setumbu area, which has been exploited through illegal logging practices.

¹¹ The funding for holding the RRB came from Sucoro personally and contributions from friends and other sources that are believed to be free of hidden agendas (such as political agendas) for maintaining the independence of the event.

¹² This happened once during the RRB 2013 when a scheduled presentation of an executive report by LIPI that collaborated with WIJC had to be postponed, because the venue was being used for another program. With very limited funding, Sucoro and WIJC made an arrangement with a nearby hotel to provide a room for the meeting. The hotel apparently used the promised venue for another meeting. Sucoro received very short notice of this cancellation. The meeting was eventually held a few days later.

¹³ It might follow the Javanese philosophy of *mili kaya banyu*, which means that human beings should be flexible as water in order to cope with whatever situations they face.

¹⁴ Sucoro, interview June 14, 2013. The writer attended the audience with Commission X DPR RI in WIJC and Sekolah Lapangan Tegalarum on October 3, 2013

The Pearl in the Bubble Tea: Buddhist Women and Social Change

Malia Dominica Wong

Honeydew flavor or strawberry? Taro essence or mango? How would you like your bubble tea served? Or, would you prefer the original design with freshly picked tea leaves steeped to perfection and poured upon glistening tapioca balls formed like precious black pearls? Although new flavors have been introduced to what is popularly known as “bubble tea,” the essence of the tapioca ball remains unchanged. Similarly, although the exterior form of Buddhism continues to adapt in host countries across the globe, the Buddha’s core teachings remain unaltered. While some people question how Buddhism can survive amidst the varied “flavors” of contemporary society, others have been paving the way for its latest enculturation. This paper will focus on five women leaders in Hawai‘i who, like pearls in the bubble tea of society, have adapted ancient traditions to modern life. As living examples of the Four Divine Abidings (*brahmaviharas*) – loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity – along with the Hawaiian spirit of aloha – they are growing the Dharma in contemporary Hawaiian society.

A Mixed Tea: Buddhism in Hawai‘i

When Buddhism formally came to Hawai‘i around 1868 with the first wave of Japanese immigrants, it served the spiritual and cultural needs of plantation workers far away from everything familiar – their native customs, beliefs, language, food, neighbors, and family. With traditional Buddhist priests to offer them support through the struggles and pains of transition and hardship, they gradually forged a new way of life. As intermarriages became more common, another, intercultural generation of family and relations with Buddhist ideas and culture was formed.

Today’s younger generation was not raised in the ethnically segregated plantation camps, however. Nor were they nurtured with the strict observance of ancestral rites and traditions of their elders. Urban life and a Western education, with broad exposure to a melting pot of diverse peoples and cultures, along with fast food, new genres of music, modern entertainment, and electronic connectivity gradually led some away from their native roots. As they struggled between asserting their independence and obediently following the less understood or valued traditions of the past, some forewent their heritage. Following the path of the Buddha was no longer important to their lives, and some temples became empty of the voices of the youth.

Bishop Jikyu Rose, Koganji Temple The Tea of Equanimity: *Upekkha*

Glancing over the sea of nearly 250 brown, blonde, black, and red-haired children gaily dressed in kimono finery with their flower-offerings excitedly gathered along the asphalt pavement, I notice that some are still being carried in their mother’s arms. The beat of the drums and the chanting in Japanese reverberates from the temple upstairs, sonorous over the English spoken below. Climbing past rows of slippers and other footwear neatly lined up the steps, I bow and take a seat at the back of the temple. To the left and right, adults and elders are clad in fine matching robes. Towards the front, I spy the small, humble figure of Bishop Rose leading the service with resounding voice.

Bishop Jikyu Rose is a fine example of how cultivating equanimity can help build a bridge from spiritual amnesia to recapturing freedom.¹ Bishop Jikyu Rose took ordination as a Buddhist priest in the Tendai Buddhist tradition at Mount Hiei, Japan, in 1973. Before taking up full-time temple ministry, she worked as a seamstress and in real estate. At the same time, people sought her out for her motherly spiritual counsel. Under her guidance, children, teens, young adults, and parents gained a greater understanding of themselves and how to live with more equanimity and peace. As a strong devotee of Jizo, she said, “I believe absolutely in the Jizo Bodhisattva and his promise. Therefore, I will do whatever I can to teach the truth about Jizo Bodhisattva and help anyone who seeks to find peace and happiness through the Jizo Bodhisattva.”¹

With a strong resolve to help others find equanimity, after she received ordination, Bishop Rose and her husband Lester, a retired Navy captain, sold their home and property and bought a two-acre lot in a quiet residential neighborhood of Manoa Valley on the island of Oahu. There, they began building what became Koganji Temple. “Koganji” means “Big Mountain, Stone Temple.” In 1982, the temple was completed and dedicated to Jizo Bodhisattva.

Unlike a number of Japanese Buddhist temples in Hawai‘i, whose memberships have waned due to aging populations, Koganji Temple continues to attract young people of diverse cultures. Throughout the year, it hosts numerous public activities to engage young and old. For children, there is the Keiki (Children) Blessing and Festival. For adults, there is the Tokudo Purification Ritual (a renewing of Buddhist vows). And everyone joins in the ever-popular Bon Dance, with its Hawaiian-adapted menu of coconut ice cream, teriyaki grilled corn, kimono dogs, and honeydew melon and other flavors of *andagi* (donuts). All of these events are richly steeped in ritual and grand celebration. Who would want to miss receiving the blessing of the Dharma, while joining in the fun? Like a precious pearl in the bubble tea, the heart of the Dharma is experienced in a new flavor.

Eshin Irene Matsumoto, Palolo Kwannon Temple **The Tea of Compassion: *Karuna***

“This is the robe I used for my ordination,” said Reverend Irene as she gently spun me around one last time and gave the sash a final tug before I went on stage as Prince Siddhartha. The occasion was a Dharmachakra performance of the drama, “Siddhartha.” It wasn’t a role I had chosen, but one that they chose for me, despite the numerous excuses I gave to avoid such a major responsibility. In the end, it was impossible to resist the gentle encouragement of Momma Irene, who like Kwannon (Avalokiteśvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion) always looks after others as her own children and encourages them to become the best they can be in the service of the universe. After all, she has always been a model of selfless service, engaged in 10,000 charitable acts and more.

Eshin Irene Matsumoto grew up in the small country town of Wahiawa on the island of Oahu, where avocados and sweet *lilikoi* (passion fruit) grow plentifully. She was an elementary school teacher by profession. Her husband’s parents, Kokan Matsumoto and Myosei Matsumoto, were both ordained at Aira Kwannon Temple in Kumamoto, Japan. Sometime before 1935, they began to establish Palolo Kwannon Temple in Palolo Valley. Irene’s mother-in-law, Myosei, had a special relationship with Kwannon and was known for her ability to bring healing to others. Irene’s husband

Chiko was also ordained as a Tendai priest and became a bishop. In 1996, after the death of her husband, Irene succeeded him to become the fourth head priest of Palolo Kwannon Temple. At that time of immense sorrow, she found great solace in the far-reaching compassion of Kwannon, who “hears the cries of all the universe.”²

Undertaking priestly studies at Mount Hiei Gyoyin in Japan was not easy for Irene. As she explained, “There I was – an American-born Japanese – unfamiliar with what was expected of me. I got by with the help of friends who taught me how to sit *seiza* properly so as to keep my toes from turning purple.” She shared a story of a time in the dining hall when everyone was eating in silence. The *takuan* (Japanese pickles) were not cut into bite-size pieces. She tried to chew quietly, but could not conceal the loud crunch. After being reprimanded for eating too noisily, she swallowed the *takuan* whole! Such was the rigorous and disciplined training she received.

Although Reverend Irene is aging, along with the membership of Palolo Kwannon Temple, her life of compassionate presence, counsel, and service to the community continues. She performs special temple services, hosts university student groups, and is involved in numerous community organizations, such as The Interfaith Alliance of Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i Conference of Religions for Peace, the United Japanese Society of Hawai‘i, and the All-Believer’s Network. Her gentle and clear-minded social involvement makes her a visible face of compassion in society – a Kwannon in our midst. Intrigued by her gentleness and active Buddhist engagement, others have been moved to study more about Kwannon and aspire to find the secret to Eshin Irene’s tea of compassion.

Keishu Shinso Ito, Shinnyo-en Hawai‘i The Tea of Sympathetic Joy: *Mudita*

Sorrow was running deep because my friend had just lost her mother. Other transitions in life tugged and pulled at my mortal frame. And yet, as I sat on the sandy beach among the crowd of 10,000 or more, holding the balsa-wood lantern we had prepared in memorial, I felt a sudden peace. Once the ceremony began, the golden blaze of purifying fire illuminated the subdued shadows of the setting sun. Following the blessing of the tranquil and pristine aquamarine water came a feeling of hope, release, and lasting sympathetic joy.

Keishu Shinso Ito was born into a priestly line. Her father, Shinjo Ito was trained at Daigogi, a ninth-century Shingon monastery in Kyoto. Under the spiritual guidance of her father and mother, Tomoji Ito, she grew up with an understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings in all cycles of life and the knowledge that true joy can be obtained through authentic spiritual practice. She was ordained in the Shinnyo tradition in 1966 and completed her priestly training in 1982. In 1984, her father, known as His Holiness Shinjo, declared her to be his successor.

Shinnyo-en means “garden without borders.” In 1971, her father, H. H. Shinjo established the first Shinnyo-en outside of Japan in Hawai‘i, a place where people could gather to polish their Buddha nature through study, meditation, and the performance of selfless good deeds. In 1992, H. H. Shinso revitalized the traditional Shinnyo-en fire and water ceremony with a contemporary approach. She taught followers to look beyond their personal needs and purification to the collective re-awakening of all – to awaken to their innate true goodness to work for healing the world.³ The

first lanterns were set afloat in the Ala Wai Canal in Waikiki in a ceremony with about a hundred people.

Today, Lantern Floating Hawai‘i is held on Memorial Day, a day historically dedicated to remembering the sacrifices of those who served in the military. The ceremony now brings comfort and peace to thousands of people from all faiths and all walks of life. In addition, numerous volunteers put the Buddha’s teachings into action by preparing the memorial lanterns and coordinating the massive event. Together with Na Lei Aloha Foundation, H. H. Shinso provides a catharsis of sympathetic joy for those seeking release from their suffering, whether it be the loss of a loved one, release from the bondage of guilt or resentment, or other miseries. She says, “We all wish for a world of peace and contentment. Accomplishing this is no easy task, but we can always rely on the hope that comes from within. When we put our hopes into action, those efforts will spread out into the world to create a better future.”⁴ Now held at Magic Island, the Shinnyo-en event is truly a magical new flavor of Dharma tea.

Michele McDonald, Vipassana Hawai‘i The Tea of Loving-kindness: Metta

The sitting had already begun, and I was late. Quietly, I tried to tiptoe across the polished wooden floor with my blue zafu. But I couldn’t stop the rosary beads hanging from my side (a part of my religious attire) from clanging together. Carefully, I tried to maneuver amidst the forest of practitioners sitting erect, with faces revealing their settled or unsettled state. My heart pounded a little faster. Finally, I plopped in a little space with a sigh of relief. As I straightened my back and started to close my eyes, I looked toward the teacher. Oh my! With the gentlest loving kindness, the teacher’s eyes caught mine. As she sat like a Buddha, her smile radiated a deep welcome of peace.

Michele McDonald, co-founder and one of three guiding teachers of Vipassana Hawai‘i, was raised in the outskirts of Boston. Her teachers in *vipassana* include Dipa Ma and Sayadaw U Pandita. She was the first woman to teach a formal retreat in Burma side-by-side with Sayadaw U Lakkhana, a senior monastic and abbot of Kyaswa Monastery.⁵ In 1983, she and Steven Smith began an insight meditation group at Steven’s house in Honolulu after he returned from training as a monk in Burma. Gradually, more and more people joined the Sunday evening sittings and Vipassana Hawai‘i was born. When Michele was invited to teach and lead retreats elsewhere, as often happened, others led the sittings.

Enlarging the circle of practice leaders was a new way of doing things. And just like the popularity of bubble tea, with its bursting pearls of mango, lychee, and passion fruit, the size of the group grew exponentially. This changed everything. The gatherings became more ethnically mixed and *vipassana* was introduced to other homes on other islands. On Oahu, Thanh and Xuan Huynh’s home became a comfortable haven for practice. Some found the meditation refreshing while others found it challenging, as the Huynh’s young children sometimes quietly interrupted their parents while the gathering of closed-eyed strangers watched their breath. But this brought Buddhist practice into the home, made it more real and more natural. This was a deeper level of practice that did not ignore the needs of the children. Michelle said, “Meditation doesn’t need to occur in a silent, separate place from the family. All should feel comfortable. There should be some ease and flow.”

The Buddha taught, “*Ehi passiko*. Come and see for yourself,” and Vipassana Hawai‘i offered a way for people of all ages to do just that. They saw for themselves that wisdom and kindness could be cultivated. They saw for themselves that the practice was nurturing for themselves, for others, and for the whole planet.⁶ In 1988, Michele began holding retreats for young adults, some in Massachusetts and some at the Hawai‘i Insight Meditation Center in Halawa, on the Big Island. Not watering down the practice, holding them to a high bar, she found that young people really love meditation. They thrive on the practice of loving kindness (*metta*) and are open to the teachings. She says, “The kindness softens the heart. Modern life is so intense that we don’t have enough softness to be kind. But with mindfulness one can find the entry point into stillness and thus grow in peacefulness and loving-kindness.”

**Lynn Muramoto, Lawai International Center
A Universal Tea: Tea of Aloha**

“Hello? I am visiting Kauai and noticed that every second Saturday of the month is the time specified to visit Lawai International Center. Is there any possibility I can come this weekend as I teach World Religions and am fascinated by what I read about the Center? I would really like to share it with my students.” “You’ll need to speak with Tom,” said a voice on the other end of the line. So, off I went to find Tom at the Koloa Library. Tom was one of the weekly volunteer groundskeepers who, for over seven years, ritually cleaned around the 88 shrines.

Once upon a time, a young woman immigrated to Hawai‘i from Japan carrying all her worldly possessions in one simple suitcase. But the most precious belonging she carried was her faith in the Buddha. That was in 1921, and the woman’s name was Takano Nonaka.

Grandma Nonaka settled on the lush island of Kauai in Lawai Valley. In time, she married and had a large family. Kauai, the northernmost island of the Hawaiian chain, experienced many tropical storms, but Grandma Nonaka survived both these and two world wars. Whether it was due to her faith in the Buddha, the healing energy of the valley – well known to Hawaiians – or the blessing of the Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* of the 88 shrines, she and her family felt safe there.⁷

In the late 1800s, Japanese immigrants arrived on Kauai to work on the sugar and pineapple plantations. Buddhism gradually took root and small mission temples appeared, scattered across the island. As the immigrants accepted that they would not return to Japan, some embarked on a project to recreate the famous 1,000-mile pilgrimage of the 88 shrines of Shikoku in their own backyard of Lawai Valley. By 1904, the shrines were complete, placed along a much shorter trail carved into the hillside. Finally, they had a sacred place for spiritual pilgrimage, to dedicate merit, and bring peace to themselves and the community. Grandma Nonaka was the keeper of the 88 shrines along the pilgrimage route and the healing Nadaka Buddha of the place.

In 1990, Lynn Muramoto visited Grandma Nonaka and saw that the place had become overgrown. She quit her teaching job and dedicated herself to restoring the pilgrimage site. She sought the help of everyone in the community, regardless of their background, religion, or denomination. Boy Scout Troup 83 was one of the most zealous first responders. They continue to help maintain the pilgrimage site even today.

Lynn established Aha Hui E Kala to perpetuate Grandma Nonaka's legacy and to preserve this Buddhist treasure. The organization's mission statement makes clear that the pilgrimage site was created to be "a gathering place for all people to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen, to feel what cannot be touched, to know peace and to receive the true spirit of aloha." The site was developed to allow people from around the world to "get in touch with the vestiges of their spiritual and cultural roots and traditions." With this mission in mind, the center has become a place of healing for all humanity.⁸

The Pearls in the Tea

From these vignettes, the dedication of influential women Buddhist leaders making a difference in the society of Hawai'i is clear. Their different styles help us to see beyond the limited horizon and encourage with hope and solace the continuance of Buddhism in relevant ways today. Without the visionary and often risk-taking social engagement of these women, one more branch of Buddhism might have faded away. But, by their lived examples of the four *brahmaviharas* and the spirit of aloha, other flavors were discovered to uphold the precious Dharma in the Buddhist bubble tea of life. How will you flavor your bubble tea?

NOTES

¹ Bishop Jikyu, "Koganji Temple," <http://koganjitemple.org>.

² Mary Kay Ritz, "Kwan Yin Inspires Women to Find Divine Femininity," *Honolulu Advertiser*, <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/17/il/il01a.html>.

³ "Her Holiness Shinso Ito," Shinnyo-en, 2015, <http://www.shinnyoen.org/her-holiness-shinso-ito.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Vipassana Hawai'i, "Guiding Teachers," Vipassana Hawai'i, 2015, <http://vipassanahawaii.org/teachers>.

⁶ Steven Smith and Michele McDonald, "History and Lineage," Vipassana Hawai'i, 2015, <http://vipassanahawaii.org/history-and-lineage>.

⁷ Jocelyn Fujii, "Lawai International Center Once Lost, Now Found," *WhereGuestBook Kauai*, 2011. <http://www.lawaicenter.org/pages/pdf/LawaiIntlCtrOnceLostNowFoundLR.pdf>.

⁸ Lawai International Center, "Mission Statement," Lawai International Center, 1999-2013, <http://www.lawaicenter.org/pages/team.html#team>

The Modern Girl as an Upāsikā: Recovering the Women in Buddhist Modernisms

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa

The turn of the 20th century was a time of global encounter and exploration. Fueled by the technologies of the industrial revolution and exploitation of colonial resources and labor, new networks of travel and commerce spread ideas and philosophies along with commodities of empire. Among these ideological systems were critical discussions of liberation and social justice in political, racial, and economic terms. Many intellectuals and activists argued for these ideas through the creation of new forms of intellectual communities that could bridge racial and colonial divides.¹ Two key themes discussed during this period were the roles of women and religion in society. Enlightenment ideals espoused that women should be equal to men and allowed access to independence in the forms of education, livelihood, wealth, and political suffrage. Religious freedom was also seen as a key element of the emergence of a world order where equality, rather than empire, defined peoples' lives. Buddhism was often seen in discussions about women and religion as an ideal religion for modern times. While the atheism of Buddhism bewildered some intellectuals, other elements of it were seen as particularly conducive to global projects and definitions of modernity.² As David McMahan has written, much of what is popular about Buddhism today in the public sphere is its popular representation as,

... a religion whose most important elements are meditation, rigorous philosophical analysis, and an ethic of compassion combined with a highly empirical psychoanalytical science that encourages reliance on individual experience. It discourages blindly following authority and dogma, has little place for superstition, magic, image worship, and gods, and is largely compatible with the findings of modern science and liberal democratic values.³

This form of "Buddhist modernism," as he has termed it, is by no means new. Multiple projects by multiple intellectual and cultural communities have in turn colluded and competed to construct Buddhist modernisms over the past 200 years. A number of the scholars and practitioners who have taken part in these discussions have argued for the inherent equality in Buddhism. Despite these arguments, the treatment of gender as a point of discussion in modern Buddhist discourses and communities has remained under-developed. This is because religious scholars and practitioners in the early decades of the twentieth century often left out women from their projects of modern Buddhism. However, as this paper will demonstrate, feminists were deeply engaged with Buddhism, and female practitioners on the ground challenged these limited projects.

Present studies of Buddhist modernism in its formative stages inevitably focus on elite English language-educated urban men, normally monastics, and leave the involvement of women out of Buddhist modernist histories entirely.⁴ A recent article by Liz Wilson has begun the process of rectifying this through examining the importance of First Wave Feminist ideals for the early study of Buddhist women in European and American scholarship, using examples such as Caroline Rhys Davids (1857–1942) and I. B. Horner (1896–1981).⁵ However, there is still little about the networks of Western and Asian and inter-Asian networks⁶ in the acknowledgement of links between Buddhist and feminist projects in the 19th and 20th centuries. The Dhammaloka Project undertaken by Bocking, Cox, and Turner has demonstrated the richness of materials available for understanding more diverse

Buddhist communities during this period in regards to class, through their investigations related to the working-class Irish mystery monk Dhammaloka (c. 1856–1914).⁷ This paper will suggest some similar trajectories and areas that could be pursued in order to learn more about the role and agency of women in forms of modern Buddhism that developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. These tools include thinking about alternative resources and archives for examining the women involved in these global networks. They included translators, scholars, and explorers, as well as the patrons that made such projects possible, and inspired active feminist groups and New Women in the pursuit of their goals. Exploring these links can provide us with alternative genealogies of both Buddhist and feminist movements. This can allow us to better understand Buddhism as it is currently deployed in discussions about women’s rights and ordination. It can also allow us to consider how ideas about Buddhism as a religion that allows for women’s liberation began, and some of the challenges that make actualizing this idea difficult.

The Absence of Women in Global Buddhist Modernist Networks

The links between Buddhist modernism and feminism are not new, and date back to the 19th and early 20th centuries – a period of global colonial modernity. As Buddhism was constructed as a tradition with ideas that mirrored Enlightenment thought, the suffragette movement and women’s rights also became concerns for Buddhist modernists, along with democratic and scientific ideals. However, these were not significant concerns for many of the male, elite, educated leaders of these movements. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the breadth and diversity of Buddhist responses to colonial modernity. Figures such as Dharmapala (1864–1933), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), Taixu (1890–1947), Shaku Kozen (1849–1924), and D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966) were instrumental to creating new institutions and texts for the global dissemination of Buddhism, and traveled widely, participating in a number of global initiatives, including global meetings (such as the World Parliament of Religions and lecture tours), creating print organs (such as periodicals, newspapers, and printing translated texts as well as new scholarly and popular works), and other moments of intercultural contact. While they were proponents of diverse interpretations of Buddhist modernism, women’s rights were not taken up as a major theme by any of them, and women’s agency remained limited within their movements and aspirations.

For example, the famous Sri Lankan Buddhist activist Dharmapala was seen as a key figure and indigenous agent who was committed to the re-creation of India as a worldwide center for Buddhist activities. He also took part in many other initiatives to publicize Buddhism through his links to the international Theosophy movement. He wrote a great deal, but his lack of discussion related to women, let alone women’s involvement in his initiatives, may be demonstrated through looking at the journal he edited, *The Journal of the Mahabodhi Society* published from 1894 onwards. During the first ten years of the journal, only three female writers were featured: the prominent Theosophists Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), and Annie Besant (1847–1933), and later the mysterious Countess Miranda de Souza Canavarro (1849–1933), a Texan who married a Portuguese Count and after his death moved to Ceylon to establish a girl’s school there. This school represents one of the few female-focused Buddhist modernist institutions to emerge at this time. Its focus on education for young women in Buddhist societies is an exemplar of the only articles related to women found in the *Journal of the Mahabodhi Society*.

At the same time, Dharmapala sympathized with women's education and saw it as a necessity. He published a few new snippets related to the beginnings of discussions around women's ordination in Burma in 1895, as well as praise of education in the Japanese Empire and the United States. However, his own view of idealized modern Buddhism was thoroughly masculine. In his own creation of the specialists in his new Buddhist order, which he dubbed *anagarika*, or "homeless protector of the dharma," he did not discuss women or their role.⁸

Taixu, another great Buddhist figure of this period based in China, was also not focused on women or their participation in the creation of new Buddhist society. While there were institutions founded for nuns and a short-lived single-issued newspaper published out of Wuhan, it is notable that women were not featured in his efforts in more significant ways.⁹

Global Buddhisms, Local Collaborators: Scholars, Translators, Explorers and Students

However, this did not mean that women were absent from these movements. In actuality, women facilitated the development of these movements in many new spaces through local networks and collaboration. Their concern for including women's issues in their work was an important alternative to male scholarship produced during the same period. While scholars such as Caroline Rhys Davids and I. B. Horner were known for their philological and textual work, they also spent long periods in Buddhist societies, particularly Ceylon. Women inspired by their example followed their lead, including Anna Ballard (dates unknown), a journalist and Theosophist who ended up in Burma in the 1890s, where she spent time ordained. She wrote about local discussions related to efforts to re-introduce women's ordination in Burma.¹⁰ While she did not name any of her collaborators, she undoubtedly interacted with local women who made her studies possible. The Belgian-French explorer and best-selling author Alexandra David-Néel (1868–1969) was also an example of a highly influential figure in the construction of Western knowledge about Buddhism, but relied heavily on local knowledge. In her many travels throughout Tibet and Asia, she was often accompanied by assistants and interacted extensively with local people, including women.¹¹ As Erik Mueggler's work has argued, the lack of exact identities and names of local collaborators in colonial scholarship should not be seen as a lack of local collaboration. Instead, power hierarchies and cultural conditions led to the obscuration of certain genealogies of knowledge, which can only later be ascertained through detective work and reading between the lines to create a more nuanced and representative picture.¹²

Buddhist modernist projects often make the mistake of focusing only on European language discussions. Research into Buddhist texts and the public sphere of local languages reveals more complex authorial histories and that women could be important writers as well as patrons of texts. For example, recent research by Martin Seeger has discovered that the popular Thai text *Thammanuthamma-patipatti* from the 19th century was written by Khunying Yai Damrongthammasan (1886–1944), a wealthy laywoman who spent many years studying Buddhism in southern Thailand.¹³ This research demonstrates the importance of reading multiple sources and archives for exploring the global networks at work in the 19th and 20th centuries. It also suggests it is important to be cautious about projecting Victorian-period gender norms onto different cultures and regions.

The Women Behind the Movements: Gender, Associations and Patronage

Another place this is important is in considering the background of many Buddhist modernist institutions and projects. Women played important roles as patrons in many projects. Mary E. Foster (1844–1930) facilitated much of Dharmapala’s work, contributing generously to his charity and school projects in India and Ceylon.¹⁴ The Countess Canavarro was also a generous and active patron. In the 1890s, she moved to Ceylon, where she headed the Sanghamitta Convent, which was also a school and orphanage. However, it was not just American and European women who played important roles in Buddhist philanthropy. Dharmapala’s mother and relatives were frequent contributors to his activities.¹⁵ Burmese noblewoman Daw Kin Kin E (or Mrs. Hla Oung, as she was often referred to, 1904–1991) was instrumental to many philanthropic projects, and particularly dedicated to the creation of schools and educational institutions for girls and boys.¹⁶ These institutions acted as important exemplars, though often obscured in institutional histories in favor of prominent organizations such as the Young Men’s Buddhist Association. Women had their own equivalents of these Associations; in post-independence Sri Lanka, for example, the All Ceylon Women’s Buddhist Congress was established in 1949 with a broad focus that includes diverse welfare projects.¹⁷ These Buddhist women were dedicated to providing girls with educational opportunities that would facilitate economic independence and used Buddhist modernist discourses of equality to explain their programs.

Obscured Genealogies: Buddhism as an Inspiration to Feminist Groups

Despite these goals of female empowerment, Buddhist women and their associations did not call themselves feminists. Feminists did call themselves Buddhists, though, which demonstrates there was circulation of ideas between these different groups. Many histories of Asian feminist movements discuss the influence of Christianity on the development of local educational institutions for women. Buddhism played an important role as well. In the early 20th century, Japan and Korea were both states with active feminist and New Woman movements that aspired for gender equality, women’s rights to education and work, and free love. Japanese feminist thought developed in salon-type environments and publications such as *Saito (Bluestocking)*. The New Women who promoted these ideas were often derided and ridiculed in the Press for their glamorous, scandalous lifestyles – rumored to engage in torrid love affairs with men and women, married and unmarried. Despite this popular representation, their intellectual contributions to the development of local feminism were revolutionary.¹⁸ A number of early intellectuals argue that Buddhism was a major inspiration to them, particularly the influential writer and labor activist Raichō Hiratsuka (1886–1971), who began practicing Zen at university. In her autobiography, Raichō wrote of Zen Buddhism’s importance to her activism on behalf of Japanese women:

... Trampled and despised for generations in a male-dominated world, Japanese women were ready to explore, and I happened to be the escape valve. I was no doubt the right person, for I had practiced Zen for several years and freed myself of the preconceptions and reached that realm where there is no Self¹⁹

For Raichō, Buddhist ideology became a resource for her cause and her ability to embark on what

she saw as an “adventure”²⁰ for the liberation of Japanese women from patriarchy. It allowed her to move beyond social condemnation and judgment through her lack of concern for her ego.

Feminism arrived in Korea through Japanese publications, but inadvertently led to the development of new anti-colonial discourses underpinned by goals for women’s liberation from Korean Confucian and Japanese colonial patriarchies.²¹ While the New Women of Korea were similarly critiqued in the tabloids for their colorful personal lives, a number were also inspired by Buddhism. The most famous was Kim Iryop (1896–1971), a renowned writer in the modern Korean canon who was apparently married no less than five times and who founded the influential journal *Sinyōja* (*A New Woman*) in 1920. In the Introduction to the first issue of *A New Woman*, she wrote of the need to radically reform women’s roles in Korea.

What should we rebuild? We should rebuild the whole society. If we want to rebuild society we need to restructure the family which is the basic unit of society. If we want to reorganize the family, we need to liberate women. If we [Koreans] want to live like other people in the world, if we don’t want to be defeated by other powerful people, we need to rebuild all aspects of society. In order to do this, we must liberate women.²²

Her contributions to Korean feminism were considerable before she disappeared into monastic life in 1935. Her decision to become a nun came from her own personal experience of loss and tragedy, as she lost her immediate family at a young age and her torrid love affairs fueled the gossip columns. Monasticism gave her peace, and she continued to write important and influential works on Buddhist thought and practice while mentoring female monastics.²³ For Kim, Raichō, and others like them, Buddhism provided new opportunities through an intellectual affinity with the ideas of no-self and impermanence. Even if official Buddhist modernists were not committed to women’s issues, feminists were at the same time reconstructing the boundaries of Buddhist modernism. They suggested the use of Buddhism as a resource for projects of liberation beyond concerns related to politics, patronage, or proselytization. Their ideas about Buddhism and its influence helped Asian forms of feminism become radical and revolutionary at a time when Western women marginalized and ignored the struggles of women in other parts of the world. The influence of their ideas remains obscured, but when put together these networks of education, anti-colonial activism, and movements of gender equality point to an underground genealogy and links between Buddhist modernists and feminists.

Conclusion: Uncovering Alternative Histories

Despite the availability of this underground history, however, some women remain absent from these genealogies. These are the women not found in official archives. The most obvious of these women include the many famous Buddhist teachers, as well as readers of their printed materials. However, less obvious are women who utilized the technologies circulated through global currents of movement, such as female pilgrims throughout Asia who traveled by train and automobile to reach the new pilgrimage sites of the modern Buddhist;²⁴ urban women in factories and schools who took part in new Buddhist groups and brought new literature; and older women who continued their traditional practice but used new offering materials and read from newly printed texts. These were not necessarily the monastic women who are often the locus of contemporary

discussions related to Buddhism and feminism, especially in regards to ordination. Looking out for such women in their indigenous context may seem obvious – after all, in many Buddhist states it was taken for granted that women were crucial patrons of Buddhist temples and active pilgrims. What is often not noticed, however, are the patterns of continuity between the pre-modern and modern forms of Buddhism that Anne Blackburn has argued are so often concealed in Buddhist modernist histories. These globalized networks were gendered in important ways. The involvement of women in these communities confirms the need to recognize women’s participation in the multi-directional construction of diverse Buddhist modernisms that include ideas about women’s equality.

NOTES

¹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

² Jeffrey Franklin, *The Lotus and the Lion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

³ David McMahan, *Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 5.

⁴ Cf., Anne Blackburn, *Locations of Buddhism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010); Anne Hansen, *How to Behave* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007); and Richard Jaffe, “Seeking Shakyamuni: Travel and the Reconstruction of Japanese Buddhism,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30:1(2004) 65–96.

⁵ Liz Wilson, “Buddhism and Gender,” *Buddhism in the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁶ A notable exception is Jaffe, “Seeking Shakyamuni.”

⁷ Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking, "Beachcombing, Going Native and Freethinking: Rewriting the History of Early Western Buddhist Monastics," *Contemporary Buddhism* 11:2(2010) 125–47.

⁸ *Journal of Mahabodhi Society*, 1894–1904.

⁹ Yuan Yuan, “Chinese Buddhist Nuns in the Twentieth Century: A Case Study of Wuhan,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 10 (2009): 375–412.

¹⁰ Her articles appeared in *The Journal of the Maha Bodhi Society* and Theosophy publication forums.

¹¹ Barbara Foster and Michael Foster, *The Secret Lives of Alexandra David-Neel: A Biography of the Explorer of Tibet and Its Forbidden Practices* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2002).

¹² Erik Mueggler, *The Paper Road* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

¹³ Dissanayake, Samanthi, “Buddhist Text’s True Author Identified as Thai Woman,” *BBC News*, March 27, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-21936656>, accessed November, 1, 2014.

¹⁴ Patricia Lee Masters and Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “The First Hawaiian Buddhist: The Life of Mary Foster,” *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2000), pp. 235–48.

¹⁵ Dharmapala’s mother’s name is included in donation lists in numerous issues of the *Journal of the Mahabodhi Society*.

¹⁶ Kim Thida Oung, ed., *A Twentieth Century Burmese Matriarch* (Rangoon: Self published, 2009).

¹⁷ All Ceylon Women’s Buddhist Congress website, <http://www.acwbc.slt.lk/projects.html>, accessed November, 1, 2014.

¹⁸ Jan Bardsley, *The Bluestocking of Japan: New Women Fiction and Essays from Seito, 1911–1916* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, 2007).

¹⁹ Raichō Hiratsuka (trans. Teruko Craig), *In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 315–16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 320 n5.

²¹ Insook Kwon, “‘The New Women’s Movement’ in 1920s Korea: Rethinking the Relationship Between Imperialism and Women,” *Gender and History*, 10.3 (1998): 381–405.

²² Bonnie B. C. Oh, “Kim Iryop: Pioneer Writer/ Reformer in Colonial Korea,” *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch* 71(1996) 18.

²³ Jin Park, *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun: Essays by Zen Master Kim Iryop* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014).

²⁴ Cf., Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, “Excavating the Stories of Border-Crossing Women Masters in Modern Buddhism: The Oral Biography of Pelling Ani Wangdzin and Her Family,” *Understanding Buddhism Through Biographies of Buddhists*, ed. Todd Lewis (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 2014), 257–64.

Gender and the Cybersangha: Buddhist Women's Online Activism and Practice

Emma Tomalin, Caroline Starkey, and Anna Halafoff

The experiences of Buddhist women across the world today are widely diverse, reflecting their geographical and social location, the type of Buddhism practiced, whether they are lay or ordained, as well as their individual personalities. However, the perception that there is also a shared experience for women who practice Buddhism that is partly defined by a sense of “unequal opportunity” has given rise to a number of organizations and networks particularly since the late 1980s that aim to link this eclectic group of female Buddhist practitioners and activists. Buddhist scholars, nuns and practitioners have been at the forefront of global Buddhist organizations, challenging gender disparities and striving for equality for women in all Buddhist traditions.¹

In recent years, more of this Buddhist women's social movement activity has been conducted digitally through websites, Facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Some organizations, such as Sakyadhita (“Daughters of the Buddha”),² which was founded in 1987 before the Internet explosion, have an online presence to complement their offline activities. Others, such as the Alliance for Bhikkhunis and the Yogini Project, have been formed more recently and their web presence is fundamental, with core activities that are web-reliant, including online fundraising and the sharing of digital material. In addition to organizations that are specifically orientated towards women, Buddhist women globally make use of a wider range of web-based opportunities to network with other Buddhists as well as to learn about Buddhist traditions and practices.

Gender and the Cybersangha

Since the Summer 1994 edition of the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* included a special section on Digital Dharma, including a “resource roundup for the cybersangha” by Gary Ray, the Internet has become a massive source of information about and a networking hub for Buddhists globally. Ray first coined the term “cybersangha” in 1991, and he writes that “this rapidly expanding “cybersangha” provides support and community for Buddhists around the world... Not since the great Silk Road through Central Asia has such a rich variety of Buddhists interacted.”³ Charles Prebish took this discussion about Buddhism and the Internet forward in his article, “The ‘Cybersangha: Virtual Communities.”⁴ While neither Ray nor Prebish mentioned the role that the online environment might play in the lives of Buddhist women, the Internet over the past 20 years has come to play an important role for female Buddhists.

Some critics have argued, however, that far from offering opportunities to unite and represent Buddhist women globally the Internet actually draws a divide between Buddhist women. First, there may be technological limitations influenced by economic or cultural factors that do not allow Buddhist women or nuns access to the Internet nor is there a guarantee that these women would choose to use the Internet if they did have access to it. However, this does not mean that Internet access is only confined to rich Northern settings, although issues of access and in particular how these are gendered are important considerations in describing and analyzing Buddhist women's web-based activity. Second, there is the “offline” critique that organized Buddhist women tend to reflect a western feminist bias that views women's renunciation as an example of feminist activism. By contrast, we adopt a framework of “ultramodern Buddhism” that accommodates those who identify

with feminism as well as those who do not, those who view issues around women's equality in Buddhism as linked to social and political issues, those who chose to ordain for purely religious reasons, those who wish to ordain as *bhikkhunīs*, those who are satisfied with other options available to them, those who have access to the Internet, and those who do not.

Gender and Ultramodern Buddhism

In a forthcoming article, Halafoff and Rajkopal have proposed a new *ultramodern Buddhism* framework, with Sakyadhita as a case study.⁵ They argue that while modern Buddhism/Buddhist modernism usefully describes the spread of Buddhism in the “modern era,” the impact of globalization, from the 1960s onward, requires new frameworks for better understanding Buddhism at the turn of the 21st century. Correspondingly, some contemporary scholars of Buddhism have raised issues with the term “Buddhist modernism.” McMahan, for instance, now speaks of modern *Buddhisms*, which are “multiple and complex,” and states that “we should be cautious about defining Buddhist modernism too narrowly or about positing a fixed distinction between modernity and ‘tradition.’”⁶ Expanding upon theories and debates within Buddhist Studies, which focus on globalization and hybridity, Halafoff and Rajkopal argue that contemporary Buddhism might best be described as *ultramodern Buddhism*, drawing on sociologist of religion Jean-Paul Willaime’s theory of the ultramodern.⁷

In this paper we argue that the Buddhist women’s social movement also arose in the *ultramodern* era, alongside a growing interest in Buddhism in Western societies. The growing Buddhist women’s movement can be seen to be a global social movement built upon traditional *and* modern, Western *and* Buddhist concepts, utilizing both online *and* offline methods to achieve its goals. In the final section of this paper we will briefly present our Buddhist women’s “web sphere analysis” as evidence of a global *ultramodern Buddhism*.

Surveying the Buddhist Women’s Web Sphere

Our analysis has identified five inter-related functions of the Buddhist women’s “web sphere.”⁸ information provision, awareness raising and activism, donations, connections, and practice. The first includes websites that provide material on the specific topic of Buddhism and women by incorporating written information, images, lists of recommended books, notices of conferences, teachings or talks and online and offline groups to join, and video and audio talks from Buddhist teachers, including nuns. An example of this kind of information provision is the “Network for Buddhist Women in Europe” website, which was established to “provide news and information” for Buddhist women, particularly those in France, Germany, and the U.K.⁹ Other examples include the “Buddhism and Women” webpage on the Buddha-net information portal and the “Women Active in Buddhism” website, which although not updated since 2001, remains a repository for teachings from prominent Buddhist women alongside their biographies, information on ordination for women, and a list of “activist women in Buddhism.”¹⁰ Wikipedia entries also provide information on the intersectional area of women in Buddhism. Entries such as “women in Buddhism,” “female ordination in Buddhism,” and entries for various high-profile female teachers such as Khandro Rinpoche and Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo provide primers for more people to begin exploring the topic.

The second function of awareness raising and activism refers to sites that aim to raise awareness about as well as campaign for the recognition of specific issues that face Buddhist women in different geographic settings, particularly in relation to the welfare of nuns. Resources include academic articles and first-person pieces written by Buddhist female practitioners, and information about social welfare projects and advertisements for offline activities such as conferences or special celebration events. Digital activism is also found in the circulation of online petitions. One recent example is the petition against the “ex-communication” of the prominent Australian-based Theravāda monk Ajahn Brahm in 2009 and, while this paper is being circulated, another event involving Ajahn Brahm has given rise to another online petition.¹¹ Due to give a pre-approved paper at the United Nations Day of Vesak Conference in Vietnam on May 7 to 11, 2014, he was banned from the event just 36 hours before it was scheduled to begin. The paper was concerned with aligning debates about gender equality and women’s ordination in Buddhism in relation to the third U.N. Millennium Development Goal Number 3, “Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women.”¹²

Information provision and awareness could not be possible without fundraising, which is the third important function of digital capabilities. A number of the “awareness raising and activism” sites were established to enable monetary donations for Buddhist women’s development projects, ranging from education to health to welfare. Throughout the world, from Thailand to California, different organizations are trying to fundraise to see their projects thrive (see the discussion about the Alliance for Bhikkhunīs below).

The fourth identified function is creating connections. A number of email distribution lists, portals, and blogs have an interactive function, to connect women either generally, on a specific issue (such as LGBT concerns), or within particular Buddhist schools. These digital resources include discussion groups and forums (for example, see the list of discussion groups on the “Women Active in Buddhism” website),¹³ Google+ hangouts (such as the one affiliated with Sakyadhita), and blogs that have an interactive comments facility (such as Bhikkhu Sujato’s blog, which is a regular forum for discussion about issues related to women and Buddhism).¹⁴ In addition, there are Facebook groups and other social media forums, such as Twitter.

The fifth function relates to practice. Many sites aim to help women (and men) further their Buddhist practice. One example is the comprehensive, multi-media and multi-language¹⁵ website run by the Yogini Project. This site, established in 2011, aims to encourage donations to support Buddhist women, to “connect and inspire,” and to foster spiritual practice through sharing online and offline publications, images, stories, and teachings about dynamic and accomplished Buddhist women and Tibetan female deities, *yoginis*, and *dakinis*.¹⁶ Drawing upon Tibetan Buddhism specifically, the Yogini project is consistent with the aspiration to fulfill the responsibilities of a *yogini* and *dakini*, namely, to spread wisdom throughout the world to assist all beings to become enlightened and free from suffering and oppression.¹⁷

Two Examples from the Buddhist Women’s “Web Sphere”

We explore in more detail two examples from the Buddhist women’s web sphere to examine (1) their rationale and intention, (2) who the web resources aim to reach, and (3) who accesses them. The first example is the website of Sakyadhita. Formed in 1987, Sakyadhita is primarily an international advocacy and communications network. It has a central website,¹⁸ some national branch

websites with material in various languages,¹⁹ and a significant online presence in different social medias. It holds bi-annual international conferences and promotes research and publications on Buddhist women’s history and contemporary issues.²⁰ In addition to the main website, a blog called Awakening Buddhist Women²¹ was set up in 2013. The blog, which was initiated by a New Zealand *bhikkhunī* and is coordinated and maintained by an international team of laywomen, includes guest posts from lay and ordained women across different traditions on a range of topics. There is also a Sakyadhita Google+ Community²² where issues related to women and Buddhism are discussed and where people post photographs, highlight newsletters and events, and connect with each other. Sakyadhita also maintains an active Facebook page that is linked to the Facebook pages of a number of national branches.

The anticipated audience for Sakyadhita on the Internet goes beyond those familiar with English, but does presume a reasonably educated audience. The main website, for instance, is an excellent resource for scholarly material on women and Buddhism, including bibliographies and publications. At the time of writing, we were able to obtain some statistics about the physical location of those accessing the Awakening Buddhist Women blog and also the main English-language Facebook page. The data reveals some interesting differences. From June 12 to 19, 2014 (Table 1),²³ most of the “page views”²⁴ of the Awakening Buddhist Women Blog are from western settings where people are more likely to be converts to Buddhism. It makes sense that the majority of these were from the U.S., since most converts to Buddhism are located there and Sakyadhita is a registered U.S. non-profit organization. Indonesia is an anomaly for this time period; the fact that the 2015 Sakyadhita conference is being held in Java could explain an interest in the organization from Indonesia.

Countries (top 10 in terms of page views of the Awakening Buddhist Women Blog)	Number of page views
United States	264
France	48
Canada	38
Australia	35
Sweden	29
United Kingdom	28
Ukraine	19
Germany	17
Indonesia	15
Maldova	12

Table 1

The data obtained for the Facebook page shows some differences, suggesting that the Facebook page has a more global reach than the blog and attracts participation from a more global cohort (see Tables 2 and 3 for data from the 28-day period leading up to June 23, 2014).²⁵

Countries (top 10 in terms of “reach” of the Facebook page)	Number of people “reached”
United States	5450
Vietnam	1322
Canada	1273
India	1085
Australia	952
United Kingdom	796
Indonesia	738
Malaysia	687
Thailand	542
France	498

Table 2

Countries (top 10 in terms of “engaged with” the Facebook page)	Number of people who “engaged”
United States	225
Canada	54
Australia	50
Thailand	43
Vietnam	36
India	34
Malaysia	28
United Kingdom	28
Taiwan	24
South Korea	21

Table 3

It is possible that the Awakening Buddhist Women blog has a less global reach because it is newer and less well-known, or that the blog requires a greater proficiency in the English language than the Facebook page, which has snappier content, including photos and videos alongside the text, which may also be written in local languages. However, the data presented here can do little more at this stage than suggest that the Facebook page, in particular, reaches and engages women and men outside western settings.

The second example is the website of The Alliance for Bhikkhunīs, which was founded in 2007, twenty years after Sakyadhita, and also has a strong online presence via a main website²⁶ and a Facebook page. It also publishes an online journal called *Present*, which can be accessed from the

main website, and organizes an annual International Bhikkhunī Day, which is advertised on the website. It is a U.S.-based non-profit organization established to provide information about and campaign for *bhikkhunī* ordination, but with the primary aim of supporting ordained Theravāda Buddhist women’s (*bhikkhunīs*) education, economic empowerment, and health care.

Countries (top 10 in terms of page views of the the AfB website)	Number of page views
United States	17,999
Ukraine	827
Great Britain	508
Russian Federation	390
Sri Lanka	172
China	150
Romania	145
Germany	134
Canada	131
Australia	106

Table 4

The main anticipated audience for both the Alliance for Bhikkhunīs website and Facebook page is women and men interested in issues around women’s ordination in Buddhism (mainly in Theravāda Buddhism), donors to support *bhikkhunīs*, and (to a lesser extent) the beneficiaries (*bhikkhunīs*) themselves. Again, the analytical data that we have been able to obtain for the AfB website (for the month of June 2014; see Table 4²⁷) indicates a large audience in the U.S. Similar to the blog, fewer people accessing it are from traditionally Buddhist countries, although China and Sri Lanka are on the list. This perhaps reflects the main aim of the AfB, which is to support *bhikkhunīs* financially, particularly in Theravāda settings, an aim that largely appeals to western donors.

Conclusion

Our survey of the Buddhist women’s web sphere is partial and preliminary, focused on English language sites. Moreover, our discussion of the analytical data from the websites is provisional, since the time periods are different and the metrics being used are not necessarily comparable. However, the data that we have provides some support for the claim that, although the Buddhist women’s web sphere may not be accessible to all Buddhist women due to various “digital divides,” and it does accommodate the views of those campaigning for equality and recognition for women in Buddhism, some of whom view themselves as feminists, it also attracts interest and engagement from women in traditional Buddhist settings and provides resources and networking opportunities in ways that go beyond a simple and straightforward association with a so-called western-liberal-feminist agenda. Under the impact of globalization, new frameworks are required to better understand Buddhism at the turn of the 21st century. We argue that contemporary Buddhism,

including the Buddhist women's movement, might best be described as *ultramodern Buddhism*,²⁸ because it transcends binary categories and instead emphasizes pluralism and radical reflexivity. The "cyber sangha" is not a unified monolithic entity, but is reflective of the diversity of Buddhism in the offline world. Cyber sisters, together with their cyber brothers are engaging in digital activism for themselves, and for the benefit of all beings, drawing on feminist and Buddhist values.

NOTES

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² Mavis L. Fenn and Kay Koppedraye, "Sakyadhita: A Transnational Gathering Place for Buddhist Women," *Journal of Global Buddhism* 9(2008) 45-48; and Kay Koppedraye and Mavis L. Fenn, "Sakyadhita: Buddhist Women in a Transnational Forum," *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 2(2006) 143–81.

³ G. Ray, "A Resource Roundup for the Cybersangha." *Tricycle*, Summer 1994.
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⁴ Charles Prebish, "The Cybersangha: Virtual Communities," *Luminous Passage: The Practice and Study of Buddhism in America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 203-32.

⁵ Anna Halafoff and Rajkopal, "Sakyadhita International: Gender Equity in Ultramodern Buddhism," *Feminist Theology* (Special Issue on Women, Religion and the State), forthcoming.

⁶ D. L. McMahan, "Buddhist Modernism," *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. D. L. McMahan (Hoboken: Routledge, 2011), pp. 173.

⁷ Jean-Paul Willaime, "Religion in Ultramodernity," *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*, ed. J. A. Beckford & J. Walliss (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 77–89.

⁸ S. M. Schneider and K. Foot, "Web Sphere Analysis: An Approach to Studying Online Action," *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Science Research on the Internet*, ed. C. Hine (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), pp. 157–82.

⁹ <http://www.buddhistwomen.eu/EN/index.php>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

¹⁰ <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/women.htm> (Accessed 01/07/14).

¹¹

https://secure.avaaz.org/en/petition/United_Nations_Day_of_Vesak_UNDV_Present_Ajahn_Brahms_gender_equality_paper_the_2015_UNDV_conference/?dTvTNhb&pv=3. Accessed July 1,

2014.

¹² <http://www.dhammadownload.com/home/item/1684-gender-equality-transcript.html>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

¹³ Some of the discussion groups listed on this portal are no longer operational.

¹⁴ <http://sujato.wordpress.com>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

¹⁵ At the time of writing, the Yogini Project website contained resources translated into Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, German, and Chinese.

¹⁶ <http://theyoginiproject.org>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

¹⁷ Michaela Hass, “What is a Dakini? Dakini Power: Extraordinary Women Shaping the Transmission of Buddhism in the West,” <http://www.dakinipower.com/what-is-a-dakini/> [Accessed on June 29, 2014]; (Hass n.d.; Simmer-Brown 2001); Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini’s Warm Breath* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001).

¹⁸ <http://www.sakyadhita.org>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

¹⁹ <http://sakyadhita.org/local.html>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

²⁰ Fenn and Koppedrayer, “Sakyadhita: A Transnational Gathering Place,” pp. 47–48.

²¹ <http://awakeningbuddhistwomen.blogspot.co.uk/p/home.html>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

²² <https://plus.google.com/communities/113715615851363832376>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

²³ Data provided courtesy of Sakyadhita International.

²⁴ Blogger was set to recognize individual IP addresses/Google accounts, so views for everything associated with the URL awakeningbuddhistwomen.blogspot.com are only counted once as “page views” from particular IP addresses/Google accounts. Some of the “page views” also include the administration of the blog.

²⁵ Data provided courtesy of Sakyadhita International.

²⁶ <http://www.bhikkhuni.net>. Accessed July 1, 2014.

²⁷ Data provided courtesy of Alliance for Bhikkhunis.

²⁸ Halafoff and Rajkopal, “Sakyadhita International.”

The Forgotten Sangha: Challenges for Non-Himalayan Nuns in the Tibetan Tradition

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

I would like to speak about a group of people who are often overlooked in the Buddhist world, even in a women's organization such as Sakyadhita. This is a group of women who seem to hover behind the scenes at most Tibetan Buddhist events. In the West, these women are often the organizers of these events, yet they are routinely delegated to the sidelines and ignored. I refer to non-Himalayan nuns.

Some Problems

The term “non-Himalayan nuns” has been coined to cover all those nuns – both Western and Asian – who follow the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, but are neither Tibetan by birth nor from the various Himalayan Buddhist regions such as Kinnaur, Ladakh, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal. These are nuns from Europe, Australia, North and South America, and various Asian countries such as Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam who choose to be ordained in the Tibetan tradition.

One may question why educated and mature women would choose a way of life so outside their own tradition and culture – a way of life that, in general, is unappreciated and disregarded. What inspires these women to leave aside their own society and embark on a spiritual journey of renunciation and dedication in unknown territory where they are not always welcome?

Of course, each nun has her own story and inspiration. Yet the decision to become a nun requires great courage and faith, often motivated by direct experience of the endless weariness of *samsara*. For some women, this weariness may arouse a deep desire to devote the rest of their lives to the study and practise of the Dharma. Many regret not having made the decision sooner. They bring with them a lifetime of skills and practical knowledge that, with wise direction, can be utilized on the path to benefit many people.

Non-Himalayan nuns in the Tibetan tradition face many problems and challenges that have generally received little attention. Most non-Himalayan nuns are mature women who have already received a good education, possess professional expertise, and sometimes also have relational skills developed through marriage and childrearing. Yet their talents are often disregarded and unappreciated. In addition, these nuns often have a genuine sense of renunciation after experiencing the emptiness and meaninglessness of samsaric life. After *actually* having that experience, they want only to dedicate the rest of their lives to the study and practice of the Dharma. However, since they usually receive no financial support, despite formally “leaving the world,” they often have to work in order to support themselves, in addition to carrying on their studies and practice. Therefore, many have to wear lay clothing for their jobs and cannot be known as monastics. Due to these difficulties, many become discouraged and disrobe.

Non-Himalayan nuns are often sent to run lay Dharma centers, but in these labor-intensive, unpaid positions, they suffer from stress and exhaustion as well as feelings of loneliness, since they are often the only monastic in their centers. For example, one nun had been working without pay at her Dharma center for *25 years*, but when she grew too old to be useful, she was simply asked to leave! Another nun I know worked at her center for ten years, but when she became ill, the lama there suggested that she *disrobe* and find a paying job so she could buy health insurance!

There are few nunneries or places where non-Himalayan nuns can live together as a *sangha* community. Therefore, they often receive no formal monastic or religious training after ordination. While it is easy to be ordained, afterwards it is difficult to receive systematic guidance and instruction.

Non-Himalayan nuns are often spiritually neglected, overlooked, and uncared for in their isolation from traditional *sanghas*. They suffer from discouragement and disillusionment, yet they receive no psychological support, and the difficulties they face are neither recognized nor resolved. These difficulties may include coping with cultural and social differences, disparities in age and levels of maturity, and differences of language, educational background, life experiences, and training.

Causes of the Problems

Traditional Buddhism tends to be male-oriented and patriarchal. Therefore, females are often disregarded, undervalued, disempowered, and exploited. Himalayan cultures are also rather insular, so non-Himalayan and non-Buddhist cultures are rarely appreciated. As a result, in Tibetan Buddhism, being a non-Himalayan nun may be looked down upon and somehow regarded as “less meritorious.”

In addition, most Tibetans assume that non-Himalayan nuns are wealthy and that after ordination their support will come either from their families or from private sources. This is rarely the case, since most modern Western families are rather anti-clerical and uninterested in supporting their grown-up daughters. Meanwhile, in order to maintain their threatened culture and religion, Tibetan lamas usually engage in fundraising for their monasteries and projects back in Tibet, India, and Nepal. However, this emphasis on funding their own projects, however worthy, often results in the needs of non-Himalayan nuns being overlooked. Since Western and Asian donors are not generally encouraged to support their nuns, nor is the situation of the nuns brought to their attention, this creates the situation that, *for the first time in Buddhist history*, *sangha* members are not being supported by their own people.

Buddhism in Western countries is mainly lay oriented and Dharma centers catering primarily to laypeople are the norm. Even though a non-Himalayan nun may be sent to run a Dharma center, and may take on that responsibility, being surrounded by non-monastic practitioners can make her situation seem very lonely and isolated. Especially in the West, lay Buddhists have little understanding of the motivations and qualities of non-Himalayan nuns. As a result, there is little psychological support or appreciation of their differences and difficulties. In general, respect and admiration is shown only to the Tibetan *sangha*. The knowledge and dedication of the non-Himalayan nuns may be unappreciated, while at the same time they might be expected to act like eighth-stage *bodhisattvas*! Western lay practitioners also increasingly question whether ordained *sangha* members are a necessary part of modern-day Buddhism. It is not uncommon for Westerners taking ordination to be seen as irresponsible people who have simply “dropping out,” so why should they be supported?

Another problem is that, in Tibetan religious pedagogy, a strong emphasis is placed on memorization and ritual, which are very difficult for non-Himalayan nuns to master. Traditionally in Himalayan cultures, most nuns begin their monastic training at a very young age, even as children.

Character training occurs in the nunneries, along with their monastic upbringing. As young children, they are like soft balls of clay that are quite easily molded into the required shape. But non-Himalayan nuns ordain as adults, so their characters are already formed and, without dedicated, skilled guidance, learning new behaviors is not easy. Therefore, not only is it important that their past skills be appreciated, but they also need to be trained properly to exemplify the monastic ideal. At the same time, they need to model themselves according to Tibetan cultural ideals as well as the cultural ideals and dimensions of mature, educated people in other cultures, both Western and Asian.

Targets

So what are we hoping to achieve for the future? We would like to encourage isolated non-Himalayan nuns to network and respect and support each other. Often non-Himalayan nuns take their cues from Tibetan societal attitudes and show little appreciation for their own Dharma sisters. In addition, it is very important to convince laypeople in Western countries and other parts of Asia who are involved in the Tibetan tradition to appreciate, respect, and support non-Himalayan nuns. We need to ensure long-term financial support for non-Himalayan nuns. In the future, across the world, we need to develop more monastic settlements and training programs. Especially, non-Himalayan nuns need to receive recognition and support from Tibetan Buddhist teachers.

Means

First, in order to achieve our aims, we need to transcend the traditional sectarian divisions in responding to the issues and needs of non-Himalayan nuns and create a genuine alliance beyond factions. We need to develop systems of communication and ways to disseminate information. Perhaps this could be established on a local basis, but then all of them could be brought together under one umbrella organization that covers Europe, Australia, North and South America, Asia, and so on.

Meanwhile, we are enlisting the support of well-known patrons from all traditions, such as H.H. Dalai Lama and other high lamas, seeking their endorsement, and asking their advice on how to proceed. In order to help our cause be better publicized, we have also considered approaching some well-known, sympathetic actresses or media personalities. We could also generate interest in these issues among journalists, including Buddhist magazines, lifestyle magazines, newspapers, documentaries, and so on, in order to profile the many diverse lives of non-Himalayan nuns, highlighting their contributions to society and the Dharma.

We envision starting a fund to sustain non-Himalayan nuns. Perhaps funds could be collected in a general pool and distributed according to need, especially to support retreats and studies. In time, this fund might also cover the nuns' practical needs, such as health insurance and the long-term problems of ageing and so on. For this project to function well, we would need to appoint a person or a team who would be in charge of organizing, fundraising, and administering the funds. A sensible step would be to mobilize and develop the experience and resources of extant non-Himalayan nuns' monastic institutions, some of whom have been running successfully for many years. This would include Samye Ling in Scotland, Gampo Abbey in Canada, Lama Tsong Khapa Institute in Italy, Chenrezig Institute in Australia, and Sravasti Abbey in the U.S. In India, near

Dharamsala, Thosamling Nunnery runs an institute with Tibetan language and philosophy courses for non-Himalayan nuns and laypeople. In addition, Tushita Meditation Center in Dharamsala, under the auspices of FPMT, runs courses to prepare people for monastic ordination.

To date, we have established a board to overlook the administration of this non-Himalayan nuns' alliance. The board includes myself as president; Geshe Kelsang Wangmo from Germany, who is the first female geshe in Tibetan history, Tenzin Sangmo, the founding-director of Thosamling, along with three other members. We have created a website for the general public to make people more aware of the non-Himalayan nuns and their challenges. This website also enables nuns to correspond and contact each other. We have set up bank accounts where donations for the support of nuns may be gathered and distributed. In the future, we plan to hold forums for discussions, both actual and virtual, that bring nuns together to create collective initiatives and trigger action. We aim to represent non-Himalayan nuns from around the world. We want to be their voice so that their triumphs and challenges are finally heard.

The Universality of Buddhism: Proposing a Sakyadhita Sangha

SungJa Cho

Buddha Śākyamuni¹ taught that enlightenment is possible for all human beings. For the past 2,500 years, Buddhism has spread and developed mostly in Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan, and Korea. In each country, a unique Buddhist tradition has developed.

From the beginning of the 20th century, more and more Western people have become increasingly interested in Buddhism and have attempted to become Buddhist practitioners. However, compared with the number of people in Buddhist countries who enter the *sangha* to practice, few Westerners have received ordination as Buddhist monks and nuns. Moreover, many of those who received ordination have disrobed. There are certainly a variety of reasons to explain the small number of Western monastics and the large number of Western monastics who have disrobed, but one likely reason is a sense of alienation. Generally speaking, each of the unique Asian Buddhist traditions includes many social customs and cultural values that may feel strange or unacceptable to outsiders, especially to those from countries that have no historical Buddhist connections.

One of the most brilliant minds of 20th century, Albert Einstein, said:

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description.²

As a universal religion, Buddhism in the 21st century should be a meeting place where diverse peoples and cultures embrace – a path that is open to everybody in the world, collectively and individually. In my view, Sakyadhita could be the best vehicle for a new global Buddhist *sangha*. Establishing such a Sakyadhita *sangha* would have several important practical implications for the contemporary world. This paper aims to provide a consideration of the questions: Why is a Sakyadhita *sangha* needed for this age and what can a Sakyadhita *sangha* offer our world?

This paper consists of four sections: an introduction, an explanation of several practical implications for a Sakyadhita *sangha*, some desirable features of a Sakyadhita *sangha*, and a conclusion.

The Practical Implications of a Sakyadhita Sangha

The three treasures of Buddhism are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Regarding the first treasure, the Buddha, there is no doubt that Siddhartha Gautama, a prince of the Sakya clan who was born in a place that is now in Nepal, got enlightenment about 2600 years ago. Among other things, he proved that human beings can achieve enlightenment and overcome the sufferings of *samsāra* through attaining enlightenment himself. Buddha Śākyamuni, the Buddha of our historical era, laid the foundation for Buddhist civilizations. The teachings he discovered form the core of Buddhism.

The second treasure of Buddhism, the Dharma, refers to the teachings of Buddha Śākyamuni. The Buddha's fundamental teachings, including the Four Noble Truths,³ the Twelve Links of Dependent Arising,⁴ the Noble Eightfold Path,⁵ and the Three Marks of Existence,⁶ are not subject

to dispute. In time, however, after Buddha Śakyamuni passed away, disputes and differences arose regarding the path and methods for achieving enlightenment, which resulted in divisions between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism. Theravāda Buddhism, characterized by the use of the Pali scriptures, has gone through many historical transformations, and is currently dominant in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. Mahāyāna Buddhism, characterized by the use of Chinese scriptures, is dominant in East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Vajrayāna Buddhism, characterized by the use of Tibetan scriptures, developed uniquely from Mahāyāna Buddhism and is dominant in Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, and some parts of India and Russia. The exile of H. H. the 14th Dalai Lama and the Tibetan diaspora since 1959 have led to the spread of Tibetan Buddhism to many Western countries, including Europe and the Americas.⁷

The third treasure of Buddhism, the *sangha*, functions to preserve the Buddha's original teachings for posterity and provides spiritual support for Buddhists in general. By definition, the word *sangha* has two meanings:⁸ (1) on the ideal level, it means all of the Buddha's noble (*arya*) followers, whether lay or ordained, and (2) on the conventional level, it means the monastic orders of *bhikkhus*⁹ and *bhikkhunīs*.¹⁰ The Buddha established the *sangha* in order to provide a *means* for those who wished to practice the Dharma full-time, under his guidance, in a direct and disciplined way, free from the restrictions and responsibilities of household life.¹¹ For example, during the Buddha's time, the process of ordination for those who wanted to practice under his guidance gradually developed from a simple consent to join the order to a more complex ceremony. The first few hundred disciples were personally ordained by the Buddha. They simply asked him for permission to join the order and he accepted and invited them in. Later, as the Sangha grew, it was not possible for all newcomers to meet the Buddha in person, so he instructed his leading disciples to ordain others. The newcomers had to shave their heads (and beards, in the case of men) and put on robes. They then formally took refuge in the Three Treasures – Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha – by reciting the refuge formula.¹²

Over time, however, the Theravāda and Mahāyāna monastic orders have developed their own unique *sangha* traditions, which can be distinguished by the colors of their robes,¹³ dietary customs,¹⁴ and further differences. Some differences arose from variant interpretations and different versions of the *sutras*. No matter how much time is spent, no consensus can be reached about how these differences arose and which are right or wrong.

One conclusion to be drawn from these differences is that the Sangha and all the rules that apply to the *sangha* were a *skillful means* to achieve the desired goal of enlightenment. The *sangha* provided the optimal surroundings for those who wanted to practice full-time. Beyond that, variations occurred from time to time, depending on geography, climate, economics, cultural backgrounds, social customs, and so on. Due to these differences, it is natural that, in time, different countries developed different Buddhist traditions. Such differences still exist among the countries of the world.

However, the different Buddhist traditions also have certain prejudices and dogmas that can be viewed as extremely discriminatory and unacceptable from a modern perspective. Some of the most prejudicial practices involve discrimination against women in general and *bhikkhunīs* in particular. As a consequence, women are regarded as inferior, in the name of tradition. The most frequently cited justification for such discrimination is the set of rules known as the Eight

Garudhammas that the Buddha is said to have given to Mahapajapati Gotami as the condition for her full ordination.¹⁵ There are many controversies and disputes about the background of these rules and whether or not they are genuine. But even if they can genuinely be traced to the Buddha, I am fully confident that the rules were given with best intentions and with love for Mahapajapati and the other women, considering the circumstances and conditions of women living in India almost 2,600 years ago. The Buddha acted in the interests of women in two ways: first, he recognized that enlightenment is possible for women, and, second, he accepted them into his order. Both of these actions were unthinkable from the perspective of Indian people at the time and were revolutionary enough to turn the prevailing political and social order upside down. It is inconceivable that even a powerful ruler in that day and age would have done something like this. In that sense, the Eight Garudhammas may have been protective measures to appease the majority of monks and opponents. Above all, I feel certain that the Buddha's actions were not intended to harm or have any negative implications for women.

Now, almost 2,600 years later, political and social conditions and ideals have been totally revolutionized. But some very bigoted monks still insist on enforcing those old rules in the name of the Buddha and tradition, taking advantage of the situation to serve their own selfish ends. They continue to assert discriminatory views by citing the *sutras* – ignoring the differences in circumstances between modern times and the era in which the rules were laid down – and declaring that nobody can change them. Burma and Thailand do not recognize *bhikkhunī* ordination and in many Buddhist traditions, including Tibet, Korea, China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, *bhikkhunīs* have few rights and little opportunity to participate in the management of the order.

The world today is clearly very different from the world as it was 2,600 years ago when the Buddha first began teaching and created the Sangha. Thus, today it is clearly natural and necessary to create a Sangha that meets the needs of this age and reflects contemporary ideals. If we wish to provide optimal surroundings for people who want to practice the Buddha's teachings in today's world, what type of Sangha would be suitable?

The American Theravada Buddhist monk Bhikkhu Bodhi¹⁶ analyzes the challenges of Buddhist *sanghas* today from his personal experience as a Theravada *bhikkhu* and an American. Bhikkhu Bodhi was ordained in Sri Lanka in 1967 and so he has lived as a Western Buddhist monk practicing an Asian Buddhist tradition for 47 years. His insights about Buddhist monasticism on Western soil seem to be right on target:

[W]e are living not in fifth century B.C. India, or in Tang dynasty China, or in 14th century Japan or Tibet, but in the 21st century The transformations in thought ushered in by the great thinkers of the Western Enlightenment – including the Founding Fathers of the U.S. – dramatically revolutionized our understanding of what it means to be a human being existing in a world community. The concept of universal human rights, of the inherent dignity of humankind; the ideals of liberty and equality, of the brotherhood of man; the demand for equal justice under the law and comprehensive economic security; the rejection of external authorities and trust in the capacity of human reason to arrive at truth; the critical attitude towards dogmatism, the stress on direct experience – all derive from this period and all influence the way we appropriate Buddhism.¹⁷

Especially after the two world wars of the 20th century, a modern system of democratic education has been implemented in most parts of the world. Humanistic and democratic ideals such as human rights, liberty, equality, justice, and fairness have become widespread and shared by many peoples in today's world. No country can close itself off from the outside world because of revolutionary developments in information and communications technology, such as the Internet and cellular phone. Humanistic ideals and the fundamental rights of human beings have now become universal concepts. However, even though the Buddha dharma is universalistic enough to apply in the 21st century, some Buddhist traditions still wear old robes full of fetters. For this reason, although many Westerners enter monastic life because they are fascinated by Buddhism, many leave it because they cannot adjust to certain rules or accept certain dogmas that run counter to the fundamental humanistic ideals they grew up and were educated with.

This century needs a new kind of *sangha* – one that can embody these humanistic ideals rather than running counter to them. This is especially important for women in developing countries where Buddhist traditions function to shackle them. In my view, the best vehicle for developing such a *sangha* is Sakyadhita. Establishing a Sakyadhita *sangha* would have several practical implications in the contemporary world, especially for existing Buddhist traditions.

First, a Sakyadhita *sangha* could embody modern humanistic ideals that are comprehensive enough to include all Buddhist traditions. Each Asian Buddhist tradition is unique, but each also includes some outdated dogmas that even their own young people find unacceptable from a modern perspective. As a consequence, many young people think of Buddhism as an ancient religion unsuited to modern times. Even young people who are deeply committed to Buddhist practice sometimes step back from or give up their commitment when they encounter unreasonable and biased practices.

Second, Sakyadhita Sangha can provide a refuge or alternative ordination for Asian Buddhist women who cannot find a compatible *sangha* within their own Buddhist traditions. A Sakyadhita *sangha* may also be a refuge for many Westerners who have had difficulty finding a suitable tradition for training in the Buddha's teachings and practices.

Third, a Sakyadhita *sangha* that embodies both Buddhist and Western liberal democratic ideals and provides alternative ways of practice may send a powerful message to all the existing Buddhist *sanghas*, especially in Asian countries where women are discriminated against and *bhikkhuni*s are treated as inferior to monks. A Sakyadhita *sangha* can be a modern model of a truly egalitarian *sangha* to demonstrate optimal conditions for practice that embrace all the world's Buddhists. The timing could not be better for accomplishing this goal.

Distinctive Features of a Sakyadhita Sangha

As mentioned above, the function of the *sangha* is to preserve the Buddha's teachings and to provide spiritual support for members of the Buddhist community, so that they can practice and follow the Buddha's teachings. A new *sangha* needs to be organized to achieve this goal. What can a Sakyadhita *sangha* provide for Buddhism in this day and age? What would be the distinctive features of a Sakyadhita *sangha* that other Buddhist traditions are not providing?

First, a Sakyadhita *sangha* can be a global Buddhist network that embraces the differences of different countries and traditions, and sees them as advantages and opportunities to learn from each

other without trying to make them artificially uniform. Every tradition has certain excellent features to learn from and share. A Sakyadhita *sangha* can be an environment for sharing and exchanging these special features for the advancement of all. The Buddha's teachings will not be compromised in any way. The aim is simply to seek and find the most appropriate practices for people in today's world.

Second, a Sakyadhita *sangha* would be flexible in addressing and negotiating the distinctions between monastics and laypeople, between women and men, between cultures, and so forth. Bhikkhu Bodhi said that one important contemporary premise rooted in our democratic heritage is the "leveling of distinctions"¹⁸ in relation to fundamental concepts of human rights, justice, fairness, and equality, including social and gender equality. Nowadays, he said, such distinctions are becoming blurred or even abolished. A *sangha* for the future should accept and honor those who have fulfilled the requisite training, whether they are monastics or laypeople, so that they can function as Dharma teachers in independent lay lineages that are not dependent on monastics.¹⁹ Thus, a Sakyadhita *sangha* may lower the barriers that exist between the *sangha* and the laity. Leadership, teaching, and other responsibilities would be open to all equally, according to their capacities, achievements, and understanding of the Dharma.

Third, a Sakyadhita *sangha* may take a more positive approach to the Buddhist rules and precepts. Traditionally, many Buddhist *sanghas* were focused on a negative approach to rules and regulations, such as prohibitions and restrictions. Certainly, monastic rules are necessary, but the Buddha did not intend for them to inhibit laypeople from joining the *sangha*. Taking a more positive approach, the rules and regulations for the *sangha* may be simplified and adapted to be more relevant for people in modern society.

To be successful, a Sakyadhita *sangha* needs to be a community that harmonizes the merits and experiences of diverse Buddhist traditions and embraces modern ideals and philosophies about human rights, social diversity, and science. Some traditions may disappear, because they cannot adapt to the changes of modern times and eventually will become like specks of dusts that are blown away by the wind. This demonstrates the vicissitudes of the world and the impermanence even of the Dharma. A Sakyadhita *sangha* would be open to everyone equally, regardless of gender, nationality, race, class, and other distinctions. In this way, a Sakyadhita *sangha* could be a vehicle to renew the Buddha's teachings in the modern age. The better we nurture the Dharma in today's world, the more it will blossom into a beautiful lotus flower like never before. Impermanence also affects the Dharma. Buddhism teaches certain truths, not by excluding or rejecting other truths, but by including them as another approach to realize the same truths.²⁰ The Buddha said that Dharma has no intrinsic form and no inherent self. The Dharma expresses itself through skillful means. Thus, I believe that the *sangha* is a skillful means that needs to be adapted to the times. We need a fresh vehicle for conveying the Buddha's teachings. A Sakyadhita *sangha* would be a fresh approach that has long been awaited by modern people. As we collectively accrue merit, the time for a Sakyadhita *sangha* will blossom into a beautiful Dharma flower.

NOTES

¹ The “sage of the Śākya people.”

² “Einstein Quotes on Buddhism,” *Tricycle*, October 26, 2007, <http://www.tricycle.com/p/176>, accessed on November 6, 2014.

³ The Four Noble Truths are the truth of *dukkha* (suffering, anxiety, unsatisfactoriness), the truth of the origins of *dukkha*, the truth of the cessation of *dukkha*; and the truth of the path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*.

⁴ The Twelve Links of Dependent Arising (*nīdanas*) are a series of causal links that explain cyclic existence (*samsāra*): ignorance, karmic formations, consciousness, name and form, the six faculties, contact, feelings, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and aging and dying. In this order, the former condition gives rise to the latter. In reverse order, when the former no longer exists, the latter no longer arise.

⁵ The Noble Eightfold Path includes right view (or right understanding), right intention (or right thought), right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

⁶ The Three Marks of Existence are suffering, impermanence, and no-self.

⁷ The Tibetan diaspora refers to the communities of Tibetan people who are living outside Tibet, which is now under the rule of the People’s Republic of China. The diaspora began in 1959 when the 14th Dalai Lama escaped to India, where he set up the Tibetan Government-in-Exile in Dharamsala.

⁸ Richard H. Robinson, Willard L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction*, 5th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005), p. 327.

⁹ Pāli: *bhikkhu*; Sanskrit: *bhikṣu*.

¹⁰ Pāli: *bhikkhunī*; Sanskrit: *bhikṣunī*.

¹¹ Robinson, et al., *Buddhist Religions*, p. 36, n. 6.

¹² BuddhaNet, *Buddhist Studies for Primary Students*, “Buddhist Monks and Nuns,” http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/pbs2_unit08a.htm, accessed September 17, 2014.

¹³ As for the color of the robes, saffron is typical in Southeast Asia, maroon in Tibet, gray in Korea, and black in Japan.

¹⁴ Certain Mahayana *sūtras* strongly discourage eating meat, but in the Pāli canon, the Buddha rejected the imposition of vegetarianism on the *saṅgha*. Monastics were permitted to eat meat as

long as the animal was not specifically killed for them. Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.157–65.

¹⁵ “1) A nun who has been ordained even for a hundred years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day; 2) A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks; 3) Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of Monks: the asking as to the date of the Observance, and the coming for the exhortation; 4) After the rains (3-months rainy season retreat) a nun must ‘invite’ before both orders in respect of three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected; 5) A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo manatta [penance] discipline for half a month before both orders; 6) When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek higher ordination from both orders; 7) A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun; 8) From today, admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden.” *The Book of the Discipline*, v. 354–55. Quoted in David N. Snyder, *The Complete Book of Buddha’s Lists Explained* (Las Vegas, NV: Vipassana Foundation, 2006).

¹⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi (Jeffrey Block) was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 10, 1944. In 1967, while still a graduate student, he received novice ordination in the Vietnamese tradition. In 1972, after graduating, he traveled to Sri Lanka where he reordained with Bhikkhu Ananda Maitreya. In 1973, he received *bhikkhu* ordination in the Theravada tradition. From 1984 to 2002, he worked as the English-language editor and president of the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka. He now lives in the United States, where he teaches both online and offline. He has published many translations and books about Buddhism and is a founder of Buddhist Global Relief.

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, “The Challenge of the Future: How Will the Sangha Fare in North American Buddhism?” <http://www.urbandharma.org/udharma13/challenge.html>, accessed September 17, 2014.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Edward Conze, *Buddhist Texts* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 61.

Creative Activity and Social Justice

Arahmaiani Feisal

Indonesia is a large country consisting of an extensive archipelago of islands, with almost 240 different peoples from a variety of cultural backgrounds. The country became a unified state and achieved its independence from Dutch colonial rule in 1945. Although colonialists implemented their self-initiated ethical policies, the impact of colonization has brought about various problems and traumas that are still felt today. The monopoly the Dutch held over trade for approximately 300 years resulted in the destruction of local cultures and eroded the self-worth of communities, causing an inferiority complex that remains to be addressed. The reality is that, even after the country was considered independent, the experience of being colonized continued, as a new style of colonialization by global powers sunk in its claws. After the coup d'état that overthrew the Sukarno regime was replaced with the self-proclaimed New Order in 1965, foreign capital quickly rushed in to the country, which is rich in natural and human resources. Investments that profited only a fraction of the people have virtually destroyed this beautiful country and her riches have been almost completely looted. A tiny proportion of citizens have undoubtedly become very wealthy, but the majority of the population is obliged to live in helter-skelter conditions without any guarantees for the future or any health insurance. Only around 2 percent of the population has the opportunity for higher education and surveys reveal that the Indonesian education system is the worst in Southeast Asia.

In the transition of power between the Old Order (as the Suharto Regime named the Sukarno Regime) and the New Order, the country also witnessed a human tragedy that was very painful. At that time, the New Order government led by General Soeharto declared war on the Indonesian Communist Party and decided to destroy it to its roots. Almost one million lives were lost in vain, murdered by their neighbours or relatives. The survivors were stigmatized and everyone related to them lost their rights as citizens and were isolated in many ways. The impact of that tragedy can still be felt today. Starting from that bloodshed, a military regime took power and held it for 32 years. This government was very repressive and allowed no one to oppose them in any way. Anyone who dared to resist was surely finished off. This could happen without any legal process. All dissidents were thrown into prison, tortured, and even “disappeared.” Around 3 million people were killed in the reign of Soeharto's power and this shameful crime against humanity has yet to be investigated or taken to trial to ensure justice. This shameful episode burdens those who are aware of the importance of honesty, moral values, civility, and a legal system that can protect the innocent.

This very cruel and powerful regime opened the way and guarded the dissemination of a consumerist, materialistic market ideology that does not represent freedom at all. Indonesia then entered the next phase of modernization – a market-oriented individualism of a consumeristic nature that has seeped into the very fabric of life, causing cultural conflicts, religious improprieties, and the misuse of power, as well as corrupt attitudes that reflect dishonesty and greed. Alongside this, the so-called Green Revolution was imposed upon a nation that consisted mostly of peasants. From then on, chemical fertilizers and machines to process agricultural products, as well as the use of transgenic seeds, were made mandatory. At first, this appeared to be a solution to the widespread, forlorn, and poverty-stricken conditions. But later, these policies created a serious social and environmental disaster. Dependence on seeds, chemical fertilizers, and machinery from foreign

producers who dictate prices at their own will, manifested as a source of calamity. The majority of Indonesians are economically marginal, so many people were affected and faced major problems as a result of the implementation of the government's programs.

In this case, the state did not play the role of a protector that issues subsidies; instead, it made the farmers' conditions even worse. By supporting a policy of importing basic needs such as rice, sugar, salt, flour, fresh fruit, and vegetables, the government essentially killed off the livelihood of peasants and farmers. This disaster, caused by policies that do not support the interests of the people and only benefit bribe-hungry officials, became a sad tragedy that continues to this day. In addition, an imbalance in the agrarian structure was passed down by the colonialists, which has yet to be changed. Moreover, there are overlapping laws and "sectorialism" in the administration of land and natural resource. This has complicated ramifications, one of which is a high rate of urbanization. However, there are no jobs in urban areas, so a variety of social issues emerged both in the villages and in the cities. For example, women are compelled to leave their homes to find jobs; many go to the cities and become prostitutes or migrant workers. Around 90 percent of Indonesian migrant workers are women and the state does not provide protection to those compelled to pursue jobs abroad. The net effect is that there are a great number of abandoned children whose mothers have left them. These children may be looked after by their relatives and family, but that is no guarantee of security. The patriarchal system in Indonesian society generally remains strong and males tend to dominate. Men make decisions for women and also for the children. This gender imbalance naturally works against the interests of women.

The repressive New Order government thus managed to raise the lower classes from poverty in a false and unsustainable manner. In the long term, the programs to "raise the people from poverty" brought about a large number of problems. Those who disagreed with the policies or the methods of the powers that be, who are generally the intellectuals, were compelled to resist in silence and build underground networks. Meanwhile, artist activists created works that creatively brought social and political issues to people's attention. However, there were always risks to be calculated.

I began my "career" as an artist in this direction, a mode of expression that continues until now. The concept of art has been expanded in such a way that it is inseparable from life itself. The artist's creativity is the creativity of the human being, which needs to be employed for the common good and to "free" people from the shackles of life. During that repressive period, the censorship of artworks and the forced closure of exhibitions occurred as if it were normal. For sensitive themes or for honest social expression, an artist would usually exhibit works in an alternative venue, managed by fellow artists and only witnessed by their own community. Even so, there were hazards to be faced. In 1983, I was arrested by the military apparatus and detained for about a month with an exhausting interrogation process that went on day and night. Although I was later released, I was forbidden from engaging in any activities, particularly in the public sphere, and was forbidden from continuing my university studies.

At the end of 1998, the New Order government fell, as General Soeharto resigned. Indonesia then entered a new era, the Reformasi (Reformation) era. The system, which was formerly centralized, was changed and became decentralized. Freedom of expression was allowed and democratic elections were held. Significant changes in the way of freedom of expression allowed the press to operate freely, and there was no more censorship. Artists, or their art, became a medium to present ideas and opinions around social and political issues without fear of being censored or

forcefully shut down by the government. The beginning of this era seemed to be full of the promise of change and yet, simultaneously, things became totally chaotic. Some Indonesians began to act like savages; they became easily angered and protested all the time for greater equality. People dared to throw stones at the glass windows of moving trains, dig up and plant on golf courses, stage protests by sewing up their mouths, or even light themselves on fire. Young women demanded to be considered equal to men; gay and lesbian groups demanded to be free from the regulations and norms that restrain their freedom of expression.

In truth, this era started with the deaths of many people. The fall of the cruel dictator was marred by terrifying incidents in which nearly 1,000 people were burnt alive in shopping centers and malls in Jakarta. People of Chinese descent became the targets of the cruelty of those who aimed to manipulate and play politics using deceitful methods. No one knows the number of Chinese women who were gang-raped or whose homes, shops, or business premises were looted. I still remember the moment I was standing in front of a mall and witnessed a group of men in crew-cuts wearing black uniforms pelt stones at the glass façade of buildings. They were quickly followed by a group of people who rushed into the building and emerged carrying all sorts of merchandise. Witnessing this unexpected incident, I could only stand in shock like a lost person. Was this the work of robbers? But why were there ordinary people there too? Besides many men, I also witnessed young and old women rush into the building and come out laden with whatever they could loot. It was truly confusing and difficult to comprehend.

Thus, my youth was spent in an atmosphere of struggle against the tyranny of power. And my art became a medium for expressing my thoughts and ideas about a life that was neither free nor oppressed, and about the sufferings of human beings and their endeavors to free themselves. I questioned the imbalanced power relations as well as the corruption of power. Was it possible that the “weak” could hold a dialogue and bargain with the “mighty,” so that their conditions could change for the better? I began to analyze and express myself through art, and I created pieces focused on issues of gender. For me, the issue of patriarchal domination became the symbol of relations between the mighty and the weak. From the beginning, my ideas were about reconciliation, because I saw the difficulties that would arise if the issue was approached in the form of a binary opposition. The principle of dialectics could offer a way out at a certain level, but it also came with the risk of distorting reality. Or it could become an oversimplification of the issues, which in the end creates different issues. The perspective becomes narrowed and takes on the nature of “black-white” or “win-lose,” so it becomes shallow and just plays on the surface of things. A superficial understanding of life weakens the capacity to comprehend values and a deeper understanding becomes difficult. On this issue, the medium of art can offer the space and liberty to avoid getting trapped in the oversimplification of issues. The medium of art, which has the nature of being open and flexible, can open up different opportunities.

Since the start of my career as an artist in the New Order era, through the changes of the Reformasi era, I have always worked with a “participatory” approach. Difficult situations taught me to not worship individualism. I understood from my own experience that in reality everything is interrelated. Not a single thing or person can stand alone without being influenced by or influencing others. I also experienced situations in which the community was of great importance for the individual. Later, this inspired me to develop an approach that is called “community based art.”

The Reformasi era, which in the beginning promised freedom, also brought about a sad

situation. The corruption that was formerly centralized now spread to different regions and the “lower” levels. Many parliamentarians at the national and regional level have been connected to corruption cases. At the time of this writing, more than 3,500 parliamentarians have been involved in corruption cases. And although many have been tried, arrested, and thrown into prison, it appears that this has not been a deterrent for other perpetrators. Instead, recently, the parliamentarians have worked to change the laws so that people involved in corruption cases can be set free!

Another cause for concern is the emergence of a new style of censorship by radical Islamic groups. There is no longer censorship by the government, but anything connected to issues of faith and religion may be censored by radical groups. In 1993, I was the first Indonesian to receive a death threat from one of these groups. They interpreted my artwork according to their thought structure and found it to be something they considered to be “desecrating the religion of Islam.” Although I tried to explain my thoughts and ideas, they did not want to know. There was no tolerance, let alone respect, for different ways of thinking at all. Since that time, Indonesia has entered an era in which conservative Islamic and other radical groups feel encouraged to show their clout. After the bombing of the World Trade Center, Indonesia, the largest Islamic country in the world, naturally became an arena of global politics. Nobody knows how many people have been the victim of bombings in various places in this country. Minority groups now receive serious pressure, and attacks on churches and temples are common. Gatherings of non-Muslims and non-mainstream Muslims, such as Ahmadiyah and Shia, have become victims of the intolerance by these hardline groups. Even though efforts at reconciliation have been made and interreligious activities are routinely held, such incidents still occur.

The problem is that, on this issue, the State has not made strict laws against religious intolerance; instead, it appears to allow it. The history of the early formation of these radical groups under the military regime must be remembered and considered. In reality, these groups of thugs in religious robes were formed by those in power in order to support their agenda and interests. Later, after the military regime returned to the barracks, these groups moved independently and joined forces with international radical networks. These groups also tend to be pragmatic, although they may present seemingly ideological arguments. It is no longer a secret that they can be “bought” to support anyone who can afford to pay them. Now that they have been embraced by Prabowo Subianto, the presidential candidate who failed to win the vote – a military general with a dark record of various human rights violations – they may become a thorn in the muscle that can cause much trouble. Even more concerning is that the majority in parliament leans towards Prabowo and can pass their agenda to have sub-national leaders elected indirectly. This, of course, is a morbid omen. The risk is that this young democratic system will die, and Indonesia will return to an authoritarian regime.

Another problem that needs to be addressed and resolved is the issue of the living environment. The second largest tropical forest on the surface of the Earth is in Indonesia and already in pathetic condition. Most of it has been chopped down for coal mining or for palm oil plantation. Apart from causing the destruction of the environment, there is also the loss of biodiversity, pollution (especially when forests are burned), disruption of the ecological balance, and an increase in the Earth’s temperature. What is occurring will have not only a regional impact, but will also have global consequences. The destruction of forests also means the disappearance of the livelihoods of the local populations and the destruction of traditional cultures. Local wisdom, which

is usually very protective of nature and the environment, now seems irrelevant and, to some, even feels old-fashioned. Meanwhile, the pollution of the environment, both the water and the air, is also a cause of great concern. Almost all of the rivers in Indonesia are polluted, full of plastic trash, chemicals, or other sorts of rubbish. In this matter, the government shows almost no concern. In cases of illegal logging in the forests, rogue members of the government apparatus are often involved in bribery and the issuance of fake licenses. The corrupt mentality of government officials is the main cause of the environmental degradation that is getting worse by the day.

With the dysfunction of the State in addressing various issues and challenges, there is only one possible way to overcome these problems, namely, communities must face the issues and seek their resolution collectively. The various elements of society must meet each other and dialogue to empower themselves. As for art, it is a medium to integrate all the different elements to smoothen communication. Art can become that type of medium because of its nature: open and without prejudice. Usually art becomes a pleasant, positive attraction that invites various groups. At least that was my experience while I was living the journey of my creative process, a process in which nature is involved with life. My method of working may be described as interdisciplinary, which places it in the context of community empowerment and does not cause any conflict. Because of this approach, all elements of the community may take part and play a role. This offers strength where it has been weakened by the rigid and corrupt bureaucratic system, which offers no opportunity for the community to stand as a subject. Citizens and community in a bureaucratic system, like in Indonesia, now tend to be seen merely as objects and their participation is ignored.

The politicians and parliamentarians are not blind to these issues, but they just employ the discourses of the issues to get votes, exclusively for their selfish benefit. Once they obtain what they want and become parliamentarians, which usually means they obtain power and wealth, they tend to forget their promises. So the issues and their concern for the common people becomes mere rhetoric, or it becomes a project from which funds can be diverted into their own pockets. This trend is not unique to Indonesia; it is sweeping the globe. In the current global economic system, the economic gap between the “haves” and “have nots” widens by the day. The number of people going hungry also rises steadily. In wealthy countries, people dispose of food as garbage, while in other parts of the world people are desperate for food. This is a sign of how poorly the system works. It also serves as evidence of just how egotistical human beings can become when they have no concern for the sufferings of others. This is extremely sad and a huge disgrace. Modern human beings appear to be robots with no heart, obsessed with power, intoxicated by money, and confidently manifesting as the destroyers of nature. Artists play a critical role in bringing these problems to public attention.

In the process of making art, ever since I began working in the art school in Bandung, I receive much support from the community. In the beginning, I worked with the artist community and collaborated with other artists from different artistic disciplines. As time passed by, my ideas developed, and I also collaborated with people with scientific backgrounds. Now I work with various communities in society and have expanded the definition of my art to be “art that is inseparable from life.” Today, I am still collaborating with various communities, including artists, women, activists, religious students in madrasahs (Islamic schools), urban communities, village communities, and in communities outside of Indonesia. Various issues need to be addressed in this work, in response to the variety of communities with which I work. Their different conditions and cultural and religious backgrounds offer me an opportunity to learn and try to understand the dynamics and issues in each

community or country. I understand that humanity is basically the same and wish everyone well. I try to stimulate their creativity, so they can discover alternative solutions that they themselves can implement, without having to go through the conventional, intricate, and fixed paths in the bureaucracy. In Indonesia, communities are all facing the same basic problems and seeking solutions, learning together and supporting each other. With trust as capital, activities like this may be held even without strong financial support. Here trust, appreciation, and creativity among the members of the community have become our main capital.

Defending the Environment in Courts: Bhiksuni Jiyul's Journey with the Law

Lina Koleilat

Bhiksuni Jiyul, a Buddhist nun ordained in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism in 1992, is famous in South Korea for her environmental activism. Since 2004, Bhiksuni Jiyul has used the legal system to protest environmental destruction caused by development projects around the country. The court case she is most famous for is the first non-human class action suit in the history of Korea's legal system: the plaintiff is the Long-Tailed Clawed Salamander. Some of the court cases she filed were directed at the media, others were filed against politicians or judges for defamation. Her most recent lawsuit was filed against the industrial conglomerate Samsung and the Korea Water Resources Corporation. Bhiksuni Jiyul represents herself at court, without a lawyer, with the exception of her first court case in 2004.

Buddhist Modes of Resistance

What is fascinating about Bhiksuni Jiyul's struggle is that instead of her resisting and challenging the current state system from the margin, she uses a tool of the state itself – the courts – and tries to obtain justice from within the system. The question that arises is how to evaluate Bhiksuni Jiyul's activism. Why does she persist in using the law in her resistance? How effective have her struggles been? In this paper, I argue the value of using the courts as a form of activism that provides long term value beyond the court cases themselves, value that is not always offered by the usual techniques employed by social movements, such as demonstrations, fasting, prostrations, or picketing. I argue that the main benefits of Bhiksuni Jiyul's approach are, first, engaging the opponent in conversation and, second, documenting resistance to the destruction of the environment and recording legal precedents that environmental activists could capitalize on in the future. Finally, I argue that the value of Bhiksuni Jiyul's court cases lies not so much in whether or not she "wins" or "loses" the court cases, but rather in the process she uses and the widespread impact of her approach.

In South Korea, fasting and bowing are among the common forms of protest and resistance that Bhiksuni Jiyul uses to raise awareness about environmental issues, in addition to legal means. In 2003, she performed 3,000 prostrations a day for 43 days on the road in front of Busan City Hall. She says this is the hardest form of protest she has conducted, because she performed the prostrations in the middle of summer, beginning at 7 am and continuing until 9 pm. She also engaged in the practice of Three Steps, One Bow, starting from Seoul and continuing all the way to Busan. Prostrations, a very common form of Buddhist practice, is often used in Korea as a form of protest.

Other forms of protest she has pursued, such as fasting and hunger strikes, have not been as taxing; she says: "Not eating was the easiest thing." The first time she stopped eating, her fast lasted 38 days. Her next fast lasted 58 days and the next one lasted for 100 days – one that put her in the hospital, where she nearly died in February 2006. "While I was fasting in front of the Blue House [the counterpart of the White House] for 58 days, when people came to visit me, they were shocked when they saw me. So the environment minister took a pledge to conduct a joint appraisal with the government." Bhiksuni Jiyul raises awareness about environmental issues using both prostrating and fasting as a social protest techniques, but fasting has been especially effective. As her health

deteriorated on a daily basis during her fasts, she displayed how pressing – indeed, life-threatening – environmental issues are.

The Concept of Interconnectedness

Eun-su Cho indicates that Bhiksuni Jiyul’s philosophy is based on the Huayan Buddhist concept of the interconnectedness of beings, in which “if one part breaks down, all the other parts break down.”¹ Cho explains that this concept includes every part of nature and life itself. In an interview, Bhiksuni Jiyul explains that she perceives her role to be a messenger – the messenger of the river and of the diverse ecosystem around the river. She discusses the four elements – water, wind, fire, and air – and how our existence depends on these elements. Even if we wish to ignore our connection to earth and nature around us, that does not mean we are not connected. We are connected to nature through the energy of earth and the living beings that surround us. No matter how small and insignificant the clawed salamander may be, its livelihood depends on a healthy environment, and its survival affects all living beings around it, including humans.

Bhiksuni Jiyul further explains why she takes responsibility for the environment. She says that some people blame the president or the government or the construction companies for environmental destruction, but assigning blame is not useful. She mentions that blame helps us hide from the problem. Our role is not to blame, but rather to play an active part in solving the problem. In blaming others, we surrender our responsibility. Based on this philosophy, she reaffirms her duty as a human being and a Buddhist nun who is connected to the wider society and to the world, to the earth and to the four elements.

Bhiksuni Jiyul insists that she is not interested in politics and is not interested in judging and blaming people or organizations. Her aim is simply to spread the message about the natural environment we live in and the importance of each living being, no matter how small. Amidst the busyness of the lives we lead in the modern world, Bhiksuni Jiyul wants to remind us of the natural elements of life, so that we do not forget the importance of this river – and every river – and the lives that struggle for survival in it and around it.

Legal Aims and Methods

In addition to her many forms of activism, Bhiksuni Jiyul’s most fascinating resistance is achieved through her court cases. Of the cases she has filed (nine, as of December 2014), the two major court cases Bhiksuni Jiyul has been involved in are the Clawed Salamander class action suit that began in 2003 and ended in 2006, and the case she filed against the construction of Yeongju Dam, which began in 2014. In pursuing these two court cases, Bhiksuni Jiyul has two main aims: the first is to document public resistance to the construction of the dam and the destruction of nature; the second is to force the government and its contractors to sit down at the table across from her and engage in a conversation.

Before I explain the details of these two aims, I would like to clarify the significance of the court cases as a form of resistance. The right-to-life law suit of the clawed salamander did more than delay the construction of the tunnel and raise awareness. It brought attention to the legal system’s responsibility for oversight and also society’s undermining of the living beings around us. With her

court case, Bhiksuni Jiyul brought the issue of the environment to the court. With it, she carried her Buddhist beliefs and her respect for nature. By appearing in court wearing her grey robes to protect the existence of the salamander, which in that case represented all living beings surrounding the construction site, she challenged the legitimacy of the entire social justice system. Bhiksuni Jiyul's use of the courts as a means of activism is striking; instead of resisting the system and fighting it from the margins, she confronted the system directly, using its own methods from within.

By going through the courts, she has been able to make her voice heard in an official, legal setting and, at the same time, has forced her opponents to provide justification for their actions. By taking construction companies and the government to court, Bhiksuni Jiyul invites them to an inconvenient conversation. She legally coerces them to justify the sustainability of their projects and, through their legal representatives, forces them to communicate with the public and clarify their positions. She literally brings her opponent to the table. Construction companies and government "development" projects that have, on many occasions, caused irreparable environmental damage and conducted their operations largely unchecked, have had to defend themselves in the public sphere. Through the process of taking them to court, Bhiksuni Jiyul has forced them to provide explanations, justification, and evidence to prove that their projects will not harm the surrounding ecosystem. Most of the time, through corruption, these companies get away with conducting environmental assessments that they themselves fund, and they can, therefore, produce outcomes that are most convenient for them. However, by going through the courts, Bhiksuni Jiyul forces them to document these outcomes. In the future, it may be possible to verify or challenge these assessments by documenting the actual impact that these projects have on the environment. Therefore, instead of protesting in front of these corporations, Bhiksuni Jiyul forces them into inconvenient conversations that they do not want to have. Through the law, they must send representatives, and they must present an argument. These court cases also take a long time to process; the case of the clawed salamander dragged on for years. At the same time, she is forcing both the legal system and the project coordinators to first listen to her and then to defend their positions.

Records of Resistance

Another important reason to use court cases as a form of protest is to document the resistance and the discussion. Every court case, once it proceeds, is recorded in detail. The argument of the plaintiff, the rebuttal of the defense, and the logic with which each party supports their position is thoroughly documented. In addition, the response of the justice system to matters of environmental concern, such as the ones raised by Bhiksuni Jiyul, is duly recorded. By using the legal system as a means to document this process, she creates a traceable record of resistance in public legal documents. Forcing the creation of these public legal records is a fundamental contribution that many social movements fail to achieve. With protesting or fasting or prostrating, the effect of the action is finite; the minute the action ends, the record of events depends on whatever other people, particularly the media, perceive the action to be. By bringing these cases to court, however, the circumstances are very different. Bhiksuni Jiyul's voice of resistance is registered and documented in the courts, exactly as she presents them. This symbolic action of recording resistance will have a much larger, longer lasting impact historically. It will contribute to human beings' understanding of the environment and of public resistance to the large-scale environmental destruction caused by

governmental actions and private corporations. The resistance forged through the legal process will transcend the time and space of the particular protest, creating a historical record for all time. This is a significant outcome that Bhiksuni Jiyul is shaping by using the courts.

Creative Activism

By forcing offenders to the table and recording resistance, as outlined above, Bhiksuni Jiyul is redefining what it means to “win” a court case. Rather than focusing on the outcome as the decision of the judge, in Bhiksuni Jiyul’s court cases “winning” is based on the process of the court cases rather than the verdict. In court, the construction companies and the government have to publicly justify that their planned construction projects will not harm the environment. Due to the legal cases she has filed, they are forced to verbalize and justify their projects. Whether the environmental assessments prove to have rightly or falsely predicted the outcome of the projects, in terms of their effect on the ecosystem, by going through the legal process and providing documents to defend their claims, the assessment reports are documented by the court and can be reviewed or reassessed at any time in the future. By forcing her opponents to justify the impact of their projects, Bhiksuni Jiyul holds them accountable to the public in front of the justice system.

With her creative form of activism that uses the halls of justice, Bhiksuni Jiyul provides a new model of resistance – a model that engages with the state and with profit-driven conglomerates and brings public attention to environmental issues wherever and whenever she creates a discussion. The discussion that she provokes is not antagonistic, but in using the legal means at her disposal, she acts from a position of strength rather than defense. By going to court, she documents the process legally. Her actions and court cases bring many questions to the table that need to be addressed in our society today. How does our justice system work and whom does it protect? While a handful of human beings continue to destroy the environment, who will play the role of preservation? Who will fight for the existence of small, vulnerable beings like the clawed salamander? What type of society are we constructing if we do not value the interconnectedness of the eco-system that involves and sustains us all? Bhiksuni Jiyul’s Buddhist perspective on the world around her and the importance of preserving the environment is contagious.

NOTE

¹ Eun-su Cho, “From Ascetic to Activist: Bhiksuni Jiyul’s Korean Buddhist Eco-Movement,” *Nature, Environment, and Culture in East Asia: The Challenge of Climate Change*, ed. Carmen Meinert (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 259–80.

A Co-ordinated Policy Response to Child Abuse and Sexual Harassment by the Buddhist Council of Victoria

Diana Cousens

Shockwaves from the news of decades of sexual abuse of children in religious and other institutions, including schools and other care facilities, led to the establishment in Australia of a Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse in 2013. The terms of reference of the Commission are quite broad, but specifically refer to “systemic failures by institutions in relation to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and any related unlawful or improper treatment of children.”¹ This year, 2015, is the third year of the hearings. At the time of this writing, the Commission has had held 2,847 private hearings, received 9,041 emails, handled 18,544 phone calls, and issued 1,123 notices to produce.

Appalling stories of mistreatment have been published in the daily press. The malefactors include a wide spectrum of Christian churches and also one particular Jewish organisation. So far the Buddhist community has not had to defend its reputation in the Royal Commission. As a reader of the news reported in the press, the persistent problem seemed to me to be the issue of a cover-up. Again and again, terrible abuses were pointed out to Church and other authorities, and the reaction has been to silence the victims or declare them dishonest or incompetent. In the case of the protection of sex offenders at the Orthodox Yeshivah College, a Jewish school in Melbourne, a Yeshiva lawyer contacted abuse victims and advised them that there was a religious requirement called the “moser principle” that prohibits Jews from informing secular authorities about the criminal behaviour of another Jew. Victims who came forward were harassed, publicly shamed, described as sick, and excommunicated.² One of the most prominent of the Yeshivah victims, Manny Waks, created a center called Tzedek, an Australia-based support and advocacy group for Jewish victims/survivors of child sexual abuse. Waks and his family were also the subject of an award winning documentary called “The Code of Silence.” The documentary portrays the terrible experience of his parents, who were shut out of the Orthodox community after Waks revealed that he had experienced abuse. It documents that they eventually had to migrate to Israel to find an accepting community.

In the case of the Roman Catholic Church in Melbourne, Archbishop George Pell, who is now a Cardinal and living in Rome, instituted what is called “The Melbourne Response” to deal with allegations of child abuse. Victims were told that they were unable to sue the Catholic Church over the abuse, but if they wished to receive compensation – and the maximum amount available was very small – they would not be able to pursue a criminal case. None of the 100 complaints raised against the clergy were referred to the police by Church authorities, although many priests were subsequently tried and found guilty of multiple child rapes. One particularly gross offender, Gerald Ridsdale, was found guilty of 81 child sex offences with a further 72 yet to be tried.³ These and many other events had led to the founding of the Royal Commission.

Perhaps because the Buddhist community is one of the newest in Australia or perhaps because there are no dedicated Buddhist schools or large-scale institutions with responsibility for children, so far there have been very few offences by Buddhist clergy against children in Australia. So as to maintain this good record, it seemed to me that Buddhists needed a co-ordinated policy response, so that temples would be able to respond appropriately and legally to allegations of impropriety. Many of the institutions now being investigated by the Royal Commission had

attempted to cover up what had gone on, in an effort to protect their reputation and assets. In doing so, they often aided and abetted criminal behaviour. Victims have reported not being believed and being shamed and shut out. In these ways, the institutions compounded the sufferings of people who were already deeply, sometimes permanently traumatized.

At a Special General Meeting of the Buddhist Council of Victoria in 2013, I proposed that Buddhists in Australia needed to formulate a statewide policy to be made available to Buddhist centers and temples, so that the problems that were occurring in other institutions could be avoided. Victims could be protected and the good name of the Dharma would also be protected. It was agreed that I would write a policy. A few months later, I presented a draft to the Australian Sangha Association at its Annual General Meeting in Melbourne. Although there was a lot of discussion about the potential for false complaints, there was general agreement that there was a need for such a policy, so as to prevent and manage possible future problems. Quang Minh Temple, a Vietnamese temple in Melbourne, already had a policy in place, based on the requirements of their insurance company, Ansvar. I proceeded to summarise this weighty document and circulated the summary to members of the Sangha, including Bhikkhu Jagannatha of the Buddhist Society of Victoria and Bhikkhuni Jikwang Sunim of the Soen Centre, then adopted the changes they suggested.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Buddhist Council of Victoria in December, 2014, I presented a final draft of the policy, which is included at the end of this paper, and it was adopted. In writing this policy, I not only summarised the main points of the insurance policy, but also added certain details regarding the compassionate treatment of victims. It seems to me that to suffer social ostracism after making a complaint was a particularly cruel and painful experience for victims of sexual abuse. Accordingly, one point I included is: "Where their identity is known, victims must not be blamed or shamed, and should be welcomed back into the community, but it is preferable that the identity of victims is not made known." In addition, a basic statement of principle was that a Dharma centre or temple should be "... a place of refuge, a place of safety. This includes safety for vulnerable people. Vulnerable people include children, the aged, the disabled, those going through grief, divorce, loss of a job or who are in other difficult circumstances."

Now that it has been completed and adopted, the policy will be circulated to all member temples of the Buddhist Council of Victoria. An application for translation into the languages of the various temples is pending. In addressing the problem of sexual abuse, it was agreed that speaking about it openly would help raise awareness and would also help communities to overcome potential embarrassment at dealing with this difficult issue. The age of consent in Victoria is 16, but the age of consent may be much younger in some countries. Temples may not be aware that all sexual contact with minors is criminal because underage children are not able to give consent.

In addition to child abuse, the policy addresses the issue of sexual harassment. Again, the intention is to ensure that a temple is a place of safety. Some members of the Sangha who were consulted reported that they had heard about incidents of sexual harassment and felt that they were unprepared to address the issue. Because the policy states that the perpetrator must be asked to stop by temple officials, now the roles and responsibilities have been defined and are clear. With the policy in place, there is no way that officials can say that the issue is too embarrassing to discuss or that it was not their role to intervene.

Furthermore, because the policy is very clear and comprehensive, temples that do not act in accordance with its stipulations when handling allegations of child abuse will have no excuses based

on culture or lack of knowledge or lack of advice from a central authority. However, at the same time, the policy has no means of enforcement and it is only provided as advice. Even so, having a single policy that is made available to all temples – one that is likely to be adopted nationally – means that concerned parties have reason to hope that any future problems will be handled transparently and that any incidents of criminal behaviour will be reported to the police. The Buddhist community as a whole cannot be hauled before a future Royal Commission and accused of systemic failure. A rogue temple will have only itself to blame.

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**Buddhist Council of Victoria - Policy On Managing Sexual Abuse
Adopted at the BCV Annual General Meeting 23 November 2014
by Dr. Diana Cousens with Input from Sangha**

The Buddhist Council of Victoria advises its member temples and centres that it is in their interests to adopt a policy to manage sexual harassment and child abuse. Buddhist temples and centres need to be prepared to manage potential problems in an organised and planned way. The aim of the policy is to help to plan a response based on individual temple's needs and circumstances and to think about the issues. The Council notes that sexual abuse and harassment are non-virtuous actions and in conflict with the Buddhist precept regarding sexual misconduct.

1. Definitions

- **Child abuse:**

The age of consent in Victoria is 16, sexual contact with anyone under 16 is a criminal offence. (See Appendix 1.)

Abuse of children could occur at the hands of teachers, volunteers, employees, members or others.

- **Sexual harassment:**

Sexual harassment is harassment with a sexual basis, such as when a person makes unwelcome sexual advances, persistent, unwanted requests for sexual favours, unwanted physical intimacy such as touching and unwanted comments of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment may have occurred if a person feels uncomfortable, offended, humiliated, intimidated and/or frightened.

2. Expectations

- The core expectations of any responsible organisation include the treatment of all people with fairness and dignity and to care for those who are less powerful and in need of nurture and protection.
- A temple or centre must be a place of refuge, a place of safety. This includes safety for vulnerable people. Vulnerable people include children, the aged, the disabled, those going through grief, divorce, loss of a job or who are in other difficult circumstances.

3. Procedure

- Volunteers and workers must complete application forms, provide references, and undertake checks to show they are not precluded from working with children.
- Persons convicted of violent crimes or sex offences cannot be engaged by the temple.
- Staff must be trained in the policy.
- It is recommended to work in pairs or with the presence of family when in contact with children.

3.1 Reporting Complaints

- Abbots, abbesses, employees and volunteers must report reasonable suspicions or complaints of abuse.
- An independent person will be appointed by senior management with the specific duty of dealing with any allegations of harm or abuse.
- Details of reported abuse will be treated as confidential.
- The temple must have a documented reporting process to handle allegations. Complaints should be made in writing and all steps made to address the complaint need to be documented.
- If there is reasonable suspicion that a member has been or is suffering abuse, the police will be contacted immediately.
- The police will also be notified if a member discloses an incident of abuse that has occurred outside the temple premises, such as on an outing.

3.2 On Hearing a Disclosure of Sexual Abuse

- Maintain appropriate pastoral care and treat the allegation seriously.
- Do not attempt to run an investigation.
- Reassure the victim they are understood.
- Report the abuse to the police. Be aware that concealing crimes or failing to provide information may be criminal offences.
- Do not contact the perpetrator.
- Retain clothing of victim if abuse is recent.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Any disclosures by a member, reports of suspected abuse and all details of the subsequent investigation will be documented promptly and the documents will be held in a secure location where a breach of privacy cannot occur.
- Where their identity is known victims must not be blamed or shamed and should be welcomed back into the community, but it is preferable that the identity of victims is not made known.
- Support, counselling, and advocacy on behalf of the victim are required.
- Brochures from health departments, counselling services or women's advocacy services should be available from the temple.
- Prevention is better than cure.

3.3 On Hearing a Disclosure of Sexual Harassment by a complainant, another person should:

- Request the harasser to stop.
- After notification, and should harassment continue, the matter should be reported to temple officials.
- Should temple officials fail to acknowledge the incident and act upon it immediately, the complainant (or another person privy to the case), should refer the matter to police and or The Equal Opportunity Commission.
- Harassment may be considered a criminal offence, in which case it is a matter for the law. In this case see section 3.2.

3.4 Managing a Complaint of Sexual Abuse

- If there is reasonable suspicion that a member has been or is suffering abuse, the police will be contacted immediately.
- A person suspected of committing abuse will be suspended from work or other duties within the temple while under investigation for committing abuse.
- A person found guilty of committing abuse, either by internal investigation or by a court, will have their employment or involvement with the temple terminated.

4. Conclusion

This policy is offered to temples where they have no policy but it is not compulsory. It could, for example, be replaced by an insurance policy required by an insurance company. However, temples are urged to adopt policies that take into account the principles and procedures listed above.

Appendix 1 - Generally the age of consent is 16, however sex is not a crime if the younger person was 15 and the older person is less than two years older and believed the younger one was 16. States outside Victoria may have some slight variations to the age of consent.

NOTES

¹ “And it is important that claims of systemic failures by institutions in relation to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and any related unlawful or improper treatment of children be fully explored, and that best practice is identified so that it may be followed in the future both to protect against the occurrence of child sexual abuse and to respond appropriately when any allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse occur, including holding perpetrators to account and providing justice to victims.” <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/terms-of-reference>, accessed February 1, 2015.

² <http://www.smh.com.au/national/jewish-sex-abuse-victims-pressured-not-to-assist-police-secret-tapes-and-emails-reveal-20150127-12zcf.html>, accessed 1 February 2015

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_sexual_abuse_cases_in_Australia, accessed February 1, 2015.

Indian Buddhist Women Followers of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

Minal Wankhede Barsagade and Sangita Sunil Meshram

Dr. Bhimrao Ramaji Ambedkar (1891–1956), popularly known as Babasaheb, was an Indian economist, politician, jurist, and social reformer who inspired the modern Buddhist movement in India. Born into a downtrodden caste in the town and military cantonment of Mhow in what is now in Madhya Pradesh, he became independent India's first law minister and the principal architect of the constitution of India. Because they belonged to the Mahar caste, his family members were treated as untouchables and subjected to socio-economic discrimination.¹

On October 14, 1956, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, along with approximately 150,000 people. The majority of the people who participated in this mass conversion to Buddhism were women. Over the years that have passed since this historic event, the entire culture of these women has changed. The journey of these Buddhist women until today is noteworthy as a vibrant social movement. Women have played vital roles in constructing the many Buddhist *viharas* that have come into existence in Maharashtra since 1956. Women have also been actively involved in spreading Buddhism. There are two main Buddhist organizations in Maharashtra: the Buddhist Society of India and Triratna Bauddha Mahasangh. In addition, there are many local Buddhist organizations that are also working to spread the Dhamma and the majority of their members are women.

This paper sheds light on the lives and culture of these women who are actively involved in teaching and propagating Buddhism in Maharashtra. It also sheds light on the founder of this revolutionary movement, Dr. Ambedkar (“Babasaheb”), who was not only the father of the Indian constitution, but was also a great freedom fighter, political leader, philosopher, prolific writer, renowned economist, sociologist, renowned social reformer, profound visionary, and reviver of Buddhism in India. He held seven degrees: M.A., Ph.D., M.Sc., D.Sc., L.L.D., D.Lit., and a Law degree. Among these, he obtained his Ph. D. and L.L.D from Columbia University, his D.Sc. and Law degree from the London School of Economics. While he was pursuing his studies, it was his wife Ramabai who bravely looked after the home. Dr. Babasaheb always expressed his gratitude to Ramabai. He emphasized that in each and every sector of Indian society, woman should be given their due share. He recognized the necessity of maintaining and protecting the dignity and modesty of woman.

Dr. Ambedkar studied all the religions of the world and finally decided to convert to Buddhism. He declared his intention to convert to Buddhism in 1936 and acted on this intention by participating in a public conversion ceremony in 1956, along with hundreds of thousands of other people. When he spoke on the BBC about “Why I Like Buddhism,” he explained, “I prefer Buddhism because it combines three principals that no other religion does. All other religions are bothering themselves about God and soul and life after death. Buddhism teaches *prajña* (right understanding). It teaches *karuna* (love). It teaches *samata* (equality). This is what a man wants for a good and happy life on the earth. These three principles of Buddhism make their appeal to me. These three principles should also make an appeal to the world.”

Dr. Ambedkar was not only the chairperson of the committee that drafted the Indian constitution, but he also played a major role in writing it. The impact that Buddhism had on him can easily be recognized when reading the preamble to the constitution, which contains the principles

of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity. The principal of gender equality is thus enshrined in the Indian constitution in its preamble, along with fundamental rights and directive principles. The constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the state to adopt measures in favor of women.

Dr. Ambedkar started involving women in the struggle for the eradication of the caste system and the advancement of the underprivileged. He felt the importance of involving women, without which nothing can be achieved. He motivated women and encouraged them to participate in the struggle against caste prejudice. During the Mahad struggle in 1927, which was a struggle to gain access to drinking water for the underprivileged at Mahad Pond, women marched in the procession along with men. He encouraged women to organize themselves. Accordingly, a large number of women became active and arranged a women's conference at Nagpur in 1942, which Dr. Ambedkar addressed. He told women to be progressive and to give up customs and habits that were detrimental to their progress.

Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on October 14, 1956, but two months after his conversion he passed away. The situation was difficult for the newly converted Buddhists who were his followers. Dr. Ambedkar wrote a book titled, "The Buddha and His Dhamma," which was the only source of inspiration to these new Buddhists. From 1956 onwards, they continuously made efforts to understand and to follow the Buddhist path.

These newly converted people were struggling hard to achieve their own Buddhist identity, which they had been deprived of for thousands of years. After Dr. Ambedkar passed away, it was difficult for them to choose the right path and the right direction toward Buddhism. The Buddhist Society of India (BSI), which was established by Dr. Ambedkar only in 1955, started spreading Buddhism among the new Buddhist communities. But it was difficult for them to reach each and every corner of society. In 1969, some of these Buddhists started attending *vipassana* courses taught by U. S. N. Goenka. In 1979, some Buddhists became actively involved working with Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayak Gan (TBMSG). There have been many local Buddhist organizations that have contributed to the spread of Buddhism and women have participated more actively than men.

In each and every *vihara* build by local organizations or by the TBMSG, or the Buddhist Society of India (BSI), Buddhist women have taken leading roles. For example, during the rainy season retreat period (*varshavasa*), women often lead readings from the book, "The Buddha and His Dhamma," written by Dr. Ambedkar, and try their best to understand Buddhism as much as they can.

Buddhist women also arrange programs on each full moon day (*purnima*). On these occasions, women gather together to perform prayers, listen to Dhamma talks delivered by monks or lay teachers, and distribute rice pudding (*kheer*) to the people gathered for the program. Children are also active participants in programs especially arranged for them. Temporary ordination retreats, when children live like monastics, are arranged across Maharashtra. Special Dhamma teachings are arranged for children in most *viharas*. Young Buddhists are now eager to know more about Buddhism and there are many organizations that support young people. Many retreats and gatherings are arranged for those who are interested to know more about the Dhamma. Dr. Ambedkar founded the Buddhist Society of India (BSI) in 1955 for the propagation of Buddhism across India. The organization is still functioning well under the chairmanship of Mahaupasika Miratai Ambedkar, the daughter-in-law of Dr. Ambedkar. Across Maharashtra, thousands of *viharas* have been established

under the auspices of BSI and the people involved in BSI continuously arrange programs on Buddhism.

Triratna Bauddha Mahasangha (TBM) was established in Maharashtra in 1979. Many Buddhists started becoming members of TBMSG and followed Buddhist principles scrupulously. There is a separate women's wing and, by now, around 70 women have become ordained members of the order (*dhammacharini*) and are working actively to spread the Dhamma. For the sake of one's practice, it is worthwhile to aspire toward receiving ordination as a *dhammachari* or *dhammacharini*.

Pāli language is being taught across Maharashtra, so that more people can understand the concepts of Buddhism. Many universities in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, and Aurangabad have dedicated Pāli language departments that offer post-graduate degree courses, certificate courses on Pāli literature and Buddhist studies. Every year thousands of people are admitted to such courses and later they begin teaching Buddhism to the public. Many among them are also doing research and women are not lagging behind. The coordinator of Pāli Department at Mumbai University, Dr. Yojana Bhagat, struggled hard to get the department established. The very first Ph.D holder in Buddhism was Dr. Meena Talim, who works for the propagation of Buddhism even today at an advanced age.

Conclusion

The work of spreading Buddhism amongst people across Maharashtra is going on at a snail's pace and there is still much work to be done in order to spread Buddhism across Maharashtra. Frequent gatherings of women at the *viharas*, with lectures given by experts, should be arranged. There should be separate arrangements for young Buddhists, to help them understand Buddhism properly, and a uniform curriculum and syllabus for children in different age groups. Buddhist women should come together and work hard to propagate Dhamma across India, the land of the Buddha. This was the dream of Dr. Ambedkar.

NOTE

¹ The family was of Marathi background from the town of Ambavade in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. Ambedkar's ancestors has long been in the employ of the army of the British East India Company. His father, Ramaji Maloji Sapkal, served as an officer (*sebedhar*) in the British India Army at Mhow Cantonment.

Linking Compassion to Social Policy

Lenny Hidayat

Buddhism defines compassion as “the factor that makes the heart quiver when others suffer and is the wish to remove their suffering.” What is the reality of social inequality in Indonesia? How can the Buddhist teachings on compassion influence social policy? These are the main questions of this paper.

This paper describes how, in the sphere of social politics, the ruler or government can translate compassion into social policies to ensure justice and fairness, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or any identity differences. Social justice is generally equated with the notion of equality or equal opportunity in society. Within human limitations, how does the government try to achieve equality and equal opportunity, especially for women and children? This paper will take Indonesia’s social policy as a case study, using data from the Indonesian Governance Index 2012-2014.

Introduction

World leaders have pledged to create a more equitable world. Nonetheless, more forms of inequality, including income inequalities, have increased in many countries over the last few decades. We can see trends, as the wealthiest individuals have become wealthier, while the situation of people living in poverty has improved little. Many forms of disparity – in education, health, and other dimensions of human development – still remain large, despite positive progress in economic growth. Various social groups, especially marginalized peoples, especially women and children, widows, the elderly, and minority groups, suffer from inadequate access to basic services. Generally, disparities between these groups and the rest of the population have increased over time.¹

The 2013 United Nations *Report on Social Situation* offers some key policy recommendations for consideration. It emphasizes that public spending must be universal, of good quality, and provide essential services such as health, nutrition, sanitation, and education. Access to education at all levels, in particular, has significant distributional effects. The basic principle of universalism must be combined with a particular policy focus on disadvantaged groups, especially those affected by multiple deprivations. Gender inequalities apply across the board and must be addressed actively when dealing with all the other dimensions of inequality. In all policy matters, relational inequalities and socially- and culturally- generated patterns of discrimination and exclusion must be confronted.²

Buddhism believes, practices, and preaches about compassion. Compassion is the ultimate practice of a heart that can encompass a multitude of dimensions: time, space, and place. The practice of compassion is achieved when one has abandoned self-interest and given all that one holds dear, entirely for the sake of others, until nothing is left. The goal is to work for the welfare of beings and accomplish their needs, even those who may be in the grip of desire, anger, and ignorance, and those who create obstacles and difficulties. The thought of giving up never occurs to them and they are totally without anger or resentment.³

However, the general Buddhist view is that Buddhism transforms the mind from within, not from outside. Of course, this is a correct point of view. But ordinarily, in relation to the outside

world, things are different. There is a tendency to see the mundane world as separate from the spiritual world. Unconsciously, this view is widespread and the premise of Buddhism, with its teachings on compassion, has not been fully realized.

This common view is adopted widely and especially in Indonesia, where people discuss politics, society, and the economy as if the topics are fully detached and separate from Dharma. Few Buddhists want to discuss these issues or are even concerned about them. So the issues of inequality discussed above are basically irrelevant in Buddhism circles – rarely discussed or even thought about. However, to be concerned about these issues does not mean becoming a martyr or a hero and taking on all the responsibility to end suffering, in the name of the Buddha. It should not be interpreted that way, because that is not the Buddhist way. To change this situation, we need to fundamentally change our ways of thinking.

This essay aims to provide insight about the reality of inequality in Indonesia. The goal is to inform the audience and to amend the common view that spirituality or the Buddhist teachings are separate from the issues of the world. Instead, it seeks to prove that the Buddha teachings are really relevant and encompass matters beyond the domestic sphere. If only these teachings can be applied and used as an approach to removing the sufferings of inequality, then even the slightest effort could bring betterment.

To achieve the goal, this essay will discuss the differences between compassion and social policy. Later, the essay will provide the scope and limitations of the discussion, especially how Buddhism could be adopted within the social policy sphere by using a case study in Indonesia's social policy to create gender balance in access to basic services. Finally, the essay will discuss the implications of adopting compassion in social policy, especially in Indonesia.

Compassion and Social Justice

Practicing compassion requires patience and effort. It is basically a practice of training our heart's capacity to relinquish suffering, gradually, beginning with those closest to us and gradually extending to all living beings. One of the most famous practices is the Seven Point Mind Training by Geshe Chekawa, which was composed in the 12th century. The twin foundations of the practice are ultimate *bodhicitta*, which can be very roughly translated as wisdom and open-mindedness, and relative *bodhicitta*, which can be translated, again very roughly, as compassion.⁴

Unlike many practices, compassion does not require that people sign on to a particular system of beliefs, nor is it something that people can only do on a meditation cushion. In fact, the best practice is often done out in the world, with exactly those people and situations that upset and irritate us the most. This practice guides practitioners to connect with the world unconditionally in positive way and also to take full responsibility for our experience of it.

Before we are able to do that, we should decide to take upon ourselves the suffering and the causes of suffering of all sentient beings (who in previous existences have all been our mothers), and at the same time to give away them whatever causes of happiness we have. And if it happens that, as we meditate upon their sufferings entering our hearts, we begin to suffer ourselves, we should think with joy that this is all for the sake of our mothers.⁵

If we think continually in this way about our own parents, we will eventually be able to care for them more than for ourselves and, likewise, with regard to our brothers, sisters, friends, and

lovers. Then we should enlarge our outlook to include everyone in our city, then in our whole country. When we get used to that, we can try to encompass all beings. If we do this gradually, our attitude will increase in scope, our feelings will grow stable and constant, and our love will become more intense. Starting thus with our mother and father, we finally focus on all sentient beings, who for countless lives have cared for us just like our present parents. We should feel a deep gratitude towards them.⁶

Reflecting like this, it is logical that we apply the teachings of cause and effect, not just sitting and praying without actually doing something. We are not just trying to make *samsara* a little bit better for ourselves, even though this is a very tempting thought. The Buddha's teachings on compassion send a stronger message with a bigger purpose. We learn step by step, until we have the capacity to completely liberate ourselves from all our shortcomings, doubts, and difficulties, no matter how long it takes. The same principle applies to all living beings. This explanation leads us not only to transform our mind, but also to transform our attitude toward all aspects of life, including social settings.

This is the most ideal situation. Back to the reality of the mundane world, compassion is like a utopian capacity. Individuals cannot transform the world alone, so humankind forms a government to regulate and manage individual interests to prevent clashes and mostly to serve individual interests. To ensure that this happens, the government creates a policy that embrace all the people, a social policy.

Social policy aims to achieve justice for all. However, before we jump into the social justice discussion, we first need to define social justice. Among many interpretation of social justice, I have chosen one of most prominent statements about social justice from John Rawls, who posits justice as fairness.⁷ Functionally, "justice" is a set of universal principles that guide people in judging what is right and wrong, no matter what culture or society they live in. The ultimate purpose of all the virtues is to elevate the dignity and sovereignty of the human person, especially those who are vulnerable, by giving equal access to the distribution of resources.

Therefore, social justice encompasses economic justice. Social justice is the virtue that guides us in creating the organized human interactions we call institutions. Social institutions, in turn, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in association with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.

Rawls emphasizes the order of certain major points in the definition. First, everyone should have equal and definite liberty to choose to be fully cooperating members of society over a lifetime, so that he or she will be able to gain equal opportunity in the social and economic spheres according to his or her background institution, e.g., family, school, society, etc. This access should prioritize the most vulnerable groups. Among the three points, equality is the most important element of social justice.

To limit the discussion, we should define the scope and boundaries. Social justice is often confused with charity. Charity, derived from the Latin word *caritas*, or divine love, is the soul of justice. Justice supplies the material foundation for charity. Justice involves rules for guiding ordinary, everyday human interactions, while charity deals with the spirit of human interactions and those exceptional cases where strict application of the rules is not appropriate or sufficient. Charity offers expedients during times of hardship. Charity compels us to give to relieve the suffering of a

person in need. The highest aim of charity is the same as the highest aim of justice: to elevate each person to the point where charity is no longer needed and the person can become charitable. But that is not a substitute for justice.

Social justice regulates the process of giving and taking from the state. And social policy detects distortions of the giving and taking principles and guides the corrections needed to restore a just and balanced economic order for all. Unjust barriers to participation violate this principle, either by monopolies or by those who use their property to harm or exploit others. As we know, most inequalities derive from an uneven distribution of social and economy access. Social justice prevents controlling monopolies by building checks and balances within social institutions and re-synchronizes giving and taking. In this sense, it is different from the giving and taking principles in Buddhism in which a person gives all without hoping for the fruits. A state cannot do that because of limited economic capacity.

However, in the mundane world, social justice reflects the human striving for other universal values, such as truth, love, and beauty. It compels people to look beyond what *is*, to what *ought to be*, and continually repair and improve their systems for the good of every person.⁸

Through examining these explanations, I conclude that the principle of compassion encompasses social justice. Both principles basically aim for the ultimate goal of loving kindness. However, social justice has limitations. If we refer to the Seven Point Mind Training process, social justice cannot even fulfill the first step of equanimity, because social justice could be applied based on territory and identity. However, there is the potential to expand the social justice approach by using the principle of compassion, which entails adaptability toward groups with the most needs. In the next section, we will see how the current system of development has not been able to achieve social justice, especially in Indonesia, but the system can be improved by using the principle of compassion.

Inequality in Indonesia

According to The World Bank's policy brief for 2014, Indonesia has one of the fastest rising rates of inequality in East Asia, with a Gini coefficient⁹ that has risen from 0.32 in 1999 to 0.41 in 2012. Rising inequality may begin to adversely affect social and political cohesion, and hinder future economic growth. The brief calls for a holistic strategy that involves the provision of basic services for the poor and enacting a social protection program that targets the poor.¹⁰ This is contrary to statistics and the popular image of Indonesia as Asia's next success stories, due to strong economic policies, high-potential markets, and attractiveness to foreign investors. Together with neighboring countries, Indonesia will contribute to the half-youth population of the world. The country has a stable democratic system in a culturally diverse context. What usually escapes attention is that economic progress has trickled down very unevenly across groups and regions – often more unevenly than official reports would have us believe. Although Indonesia has embraced democratic and decentralized government, the disparities between socio-economic groups and subnational regions remain substantial.¹¹ This is due to uneven treatment in the economic formula of budget fund transfers from the central to the regional. It pushes more development to boost economic growth. Is it certain that if development grows, then more equity will be achieved?

Priority Mismatch

The United Nations World report on the social situation highlights the paradox of development all around the world. The report basically shows that there is no clear relationship between inequality and development: income disparities have increased in many countries and have declined in some others, as countries have grown and developed in the last 25 years. Yet, increasing inequality has been assumed to be the cost of the development process, probably based on the Kuznets proposition that inequality tends to be low at the early stages of development, when societies are mostly agricultural, and increases as industry develops, countries urbanize, and economies grow faster.¹² As countries develop further, increased wealth would enable the introduction of broad-based education and social protections, and the growing political power of urban lower-income groups would result in support for more even income distributions. This is exactly what happens in Indonesia.

Despite the broad expectation that inequalities should decline systematically as societies develop, or remain low in developed societies, evidence shows that the move towards less inequality is not automatic. Rather, government policies and especially social policies must actively pursue such a goal. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that much depends on country-specific conditions and national policymaking. The poor are more likely to benefit from economic growth and share in the gains from globalization when there are pro-poor national policies in place, where growth is equitable, and labour markets inclusive¹³

Snapshot on Gender Balance at Provincial Level: Gap in Mainstreaming Gender Equality in 33 Provinces

The Indonesian Governance Index (IGI) produces a gender inequity sub-index which ranks all provinces based on eight gender indicators: institutional level (a formal women and children protection body, women's representation at local parliament and bureaucracy, and existence of a gender working group); process level (gender mainstreaming in civil society programs and acknowledgement of female workers); and impact level (percentage of medically assisted births, ratio of male and female school periods). From these eight proxy indicators, the IGI found that gender mainstreaming in Indonesia is still at a procedural level. More than half of the provinces have women and children protection units and there is an increase in women's participation in politics.

Nevertheless, at both the process and impact levels, the IGI found inequity in terms of fulfillment of basic services. For example, throughout Indonesia, the male to female school participation rate still shows a six-month to one-year gap. Female students tend to quit schools earlier than male students. Another example in health sector services is medically assisted birth, which only covered 74% of the total births. Both institutional and impact-level indicators show that gender mainstreaming efforts in public services still face challenges. Generally, most regions have formal institutions in place for the protection and empowerment of women and children. However, performance of these institutions is not measureable and gender working groups at the provincial level are identified as performing poorly.

In response to these concerns, IGI has put more emphasis on the process of mainstreaming gender equality – not merely on the establishment of formal institutions or allocation of budget, but

on substantial changes in the systems and paradigms, through the formulation of policies that are more favorable to women's rights. This is where female decision makers and policy implementers should play significant roles in creating an enabling environment to ensure friendly policies for women and vulnerable groups.

In this regard, although Maluku has the highest percentage of women in the parliament and bureaucracy, it is the only province that does not have a formal institution in place for the protection and empowerment of women; hence, it is ranked among the bottom five on gender balance index. This finding indicates that a substantial number of women in high-ranking policymaking and policy implementation does not necessarily mean more attention to gender issues. Therefore, efforts to increase the number of women participating in politics should be accompanied by improving the capacity for strategic decision making to ensure equal attention to all society groups.

Further in-depth assessment of the impact of policies indicates that gender-mainstreaming efforts have, in fact, not been able to fully ensure the fulfilment of basic rights for women. For instance, there is still a significant gap of the length of school attendance between girls and boys in nine-year compulsory education. On average, at the national level, boys attend schools for eight years, whereas women attend for 7.5 years, or drop out of school 6 months sooner. The most significant gap is evident in Papua, where girls drop out of school 1.5 years sooner than boys. Bali follows suit, with girls dropping out 1.6 years sooner than boys and West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), where girls drop out 1.2 year sooner than boys. Interestingly, two provinces with the highest IGI performance show significant gaps, namely, in East Java, where girls drop out 1.1 years sooner, and Yogyakarta, where girls drop out 1.2 year sooner.

An additional indicator of the fulfilment of the rights of women is basic services in health care, through the percentage of medically supported births (medical doctor and midwife) to the total number of births. A good performance in ensuring fairness in public services should indicate that 100 percent women are medically supported by medical professionals during child delivery. The results of the IGI assessment, however, indicate that an average of only 74.62 percent of women are supported by medical professionals during child delivery. The poorest performance in this regard is shown by West Sulawesi Province, where only 42.81 percent of women had medically supported births; the best performance is shown by Yogyakarta Province,¹⁴ with 98.04 percent medically supported births. The IGI team found similar patterns at the district level. Although some of the number found are startling, we also find hope at the district level.

Snapshot on Gender Balance at District Level: Insufficient Education Allocation at 34 Districts in Indonesia¹⁵

In Indonesia, many provincial and district governments claim to have achieved the 20 percent budget allocation or more for education since 2006. However, after further analysis, after separating operational and program costs in the local budgets, the allocation for education programs at the provincial level only reached 13-14 percent in 2011 and we found similar pattern at the district level. This is also factor of the formula and the rigid budgetary regulation.

In terms of impact, improvement in the quality of education, as reflected in the HDI score, has been stagnant in the past five years. The index score has risen from 0.557 to 0.577, marking a slight increase of only 0.02. The impact of this is a widening public service gap. An extreme example

is shown in the disparity of the length of schooling between boys and girls at the district/city level. In Sampang, East Java, the average length of boys' school is five years, while for girls it is only four years. By contrast, the city of Banda Aceh indicated that they have achieved the implementation of 12 years of compulsory education for both genders.

Fair does not mean that the allocation is the same throughout the provinces or districts, but indicates the government's aim to reach universal coverage according to local needs. This also depends on the society's economy structure and the proportion of public and private schools. For example, in Yogyakarta the provincial government only allocates Rp.108,903 and the Yogyakarta city government allocates Rp.743,696 (around USD 80) per student per annum, yet it has reached almost universal coverage of 12 years compulsory education. A contributing factor is the high participation of private schools, which are attended by mostly well-off students from outside Yogyakarta. However, the provincial government should be able to push for a larger budget, so that it can give more assistance at the district level.

We can also see that Gunung Kidul, with a lower local budget than Yogyakarta, has a high concern for education when it allocates Rp.1,161,503 (around USD100 per student per annum) and yet school disparity still high: eight years for boys and six years for girls. Thus we can conclude that the point is not the amount so much as whether the allocation is sufficient to make a change. Gunung Kidul is an example of a responsive government, but one that is hampered by stringent budgetary nomenclatures. We found a similar trend in health and poverty reduction budgets.

Implications

From this case, however, we can see that budget capacity is not the main reason for providing social justice, but rather the intention or motivation behind the social policy and the political will to enforce and enact the policy. There are a few implications of the fallacies of this policy. First, from this case we can see that the social policy is lacking in fundamental motivation. It might hit the target, but miss the point. Why? Because the policy is not derived from a motivation to reach local needs; instead, it is just a formality to fulfill a constitutional mandate. Second, it uses only a mathematical formula as a tool of justice to distribute allocations throughout the country, instead taking into account the local context. The IGI team has raised this issue and recommended a change of policy to the national media, politicians, and policy makers. In response, it has raised the awareness of the President of Indonesia, Jokowi, and the cabinet to change the criteria of the formula. As reported by CNN Indonesia, President Jokowi has discussed this issue with the Minister of Finance, asking him to change and revise the formula approach¹⁶ according to IGI recommendations.

One major change is that, before the calculation did not recognize good government performance, but now this has been inserted as part of the criteria of the formula. Local governments like Gn. Kidul could get more social allocation funds from the central government, because they have good political will to effect social change.

Adopting Compassion in Social Policy

Although compassion is seen as an ideal concept, but that does not mean that it could not be

implemented. We have every reason to adopt it, especially in times when discrepancies occur and inequality increases. To respond to this situation, all Buddhists could echo this principle by practicing and applying it in everything they do. This would create a snowball effect and the compassionate approach could influence policymakers. Compassion is not the goal; compassion is the process of using fundamental and universal values of loving kindness in everyday life, including in making and influencing policy.

In the end, it is considerations of compassionate and an understanding of people's needs that can produce effective policy, not just mathematics or logic. The IGI proves that numbers are just numbers; the meaning behind them is most important. However, somewhere in between, IGI is trying to balance the approach by understanding three levels of policy implementation: at the district, provincial, and central levels. The IGI approach responds by showing in what ways the policy can bring betterment to individuals: the people of Indonesia.

NOTES

¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Inequality Matters: A Report on the World Social Situation* (New York: United Nations, 2013).

² Ibid.

³ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (trans. Padmakara Translation Group), *Enlightened Courage: An Explanation of Atisha's Seven Point Mind Training* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1993). Quoted in <http://lojongmindtraining.com/Commentary.aspx?author=35&proverb=7>, accessed May 12, 2015.

⁴ Alexander Berzin Archive, "Explanation of the Seven Point Attitude Training," www.berzinarchives.com/web/x/nav/group.html_1783892587.html. Accessed June 5, 2015.

⁵ Rinpoche, *Enlightened Courage*, op cit.

⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1995), pp. 3–53.

⁸ For more discussion on these terms, see Chapter 5 of *The Capitalist Manifesto*, by Louis O. Kelso and Mortimer J. Adler (Random House, 1958) and Chapters 3 and 4 of John H. Miller, "Curing World Poverty: The New Role of Property," Center for Social and Economic Justice. www.cesj.org/resources/articles-index/curing-world-poverty-the-new-role-of-property-summary, Accessed June 5, 2015.

⁹ The Gini coefficient is a method of statistically measuring inequalities in income distribution.

¹⁰ World Bank Policy Brief, 2014.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/indonesia/brief/reducing-inequality-in-indonesia>

¹¹ Christian von Luebke is a research fellow at the Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University.

¹² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Inequality Matters*, pp. 33.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Indonesia Governance Index, 33 Provinces, 2012.

¹⁵ Indonesia Governance Index, 33 Districts/Cities, 2014.

¹⁶ <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/ekonomi/20150429153410-78-50082/2016-jokowi-janji-tambah-anggaran-transfer-daerah-rp-106-t/>

Avalokiteśvara's Embrace of Diversity: Respect and Empathy

Hsiao-Lan Hu

Every Mahāyāna Buddhist knows Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Whether known by the name Quanyin, Kannon, Kwan Um, Quan Am, or Chenrezig, the “Perceiver of the Cries of the World” is the most popular *bodhisattva* in the Buddhist world,¹ believed to come to the rescue of people who cry out the *bodhisattva*'s name. Many Mahāyānists are also familiar with the idea that Avalokiteśvara takes many different forms in order to liberate various beings. The textbook interpretation of Avalokiteśvara's taking different forms focuses on the *bodhisattva*'s ability and motivation: the act of taking various forms is a display of skillful means, which is rooted in immense compassion. But what is the significance of the forms taken? For ordinary people, what can it mean to conceptualize Avalokiteśvara in their own form or in the form of many human or non-human others? And what can the ability of transformation mean to ordinary people who are very much confined to one physical form in their concrete everyday life? This paper aims to tease out the implications of Avalokiteśvara's transformation in multiple forms, particularly the implications for minorities who experience additional layers of suffering due to their non-normative identities.

Different *sūtras*, and in fact different versions of the same *sūtra*, mention the numerous forms that Avalokiteśvara takes. Take the *Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra; “Sūtra of the White Lotus of the True Dharma”)*, for example. The most popular version is the Chinese translation rendered by Kumārajīva (Chinese: Jiu-mo-luo-shi [344-413, or 350-409]) in 406 CE, entitled *Miao-fa lien-hua jing*.² This is the standard version used by Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhists. In Chapter 25 of this version, when the Inexhaustible Mind Bodhisattva (Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Aksayamati) asks the Buddha why Avalokiteśvara travels around in this world, how Avalokiteśvara teaches the Dharma for the sake of the living, and what sort of skillful means Avalokiteśvara has, the Buddha replies that, in response to different needs of living beings, Avalokiteśvara immediately manifests in one of 33 forms in order to convey the beings to deliverance.³ Chün-Fang Yü, the author of *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*, comments that those forms mentioned “had relevance to a religious universe intelligible only to people living in ancient India,”⁴ and that “the number thirty-three is meaningful only in the Vedic and Hindu context.”⁵ However, the number 33 was not meaningful enough for all Indian Buddhist writers to adopt, nor did the various forms become a standardized repertoire. An earlier version of the *Lotus Sūtra* translated into Chinese in 286 CE by Dharmarakṣa (Chinese: Zhu-fa-hu [ca. 230-?]), entitled *Zheng-fa-hua jing*,⁶ lists only 17 forms.⁷ Hendrik Kern's English translation from a Nepalese manuscript, which dates to 1039 CE but was probably compiled much earlier, lists only 16 forms.⁸ Therefore, the list of the forms that Avalokiteśvara can take was hardly standardized when the different versions of the *Lotus Sūtra* were written between the first century BCE and the third century CE.⁹

What is the significance of the variations of the forms listed? Both of the shorter lists contain mostly non-human forms, and neither list contains explicitly female forms. If the Buddha, *bodhisattva*, and *pratyekabuddha* are considered transcending humanity and thus non-human, then only eight out of the 17 forms listed in the *Zheng-fa-hua jing* are human: *śravaka*, the rich and powerful, *cakravartin*, general, *bhikṣu*, hermit, *rsi*, and student. Again, if the Buddha, *bodhisattva*, and *pratyekabuddha* are considered as transcending humanity, Nepalese manuscript lists only three human forms out of 16 forms in total: *śravaka*, *cakravartin*, and *brahmin*. If we compare these two

shorter lists with the list in Kumārajīva's translation, it is apparent that the author or authors of the latter deliberately added more human forms and particularly female human forms. Of the 33 forms listed, 16 are human, seven of which are explicitly female: *bhiksuni*, *upāsikā*, wife of an elder, wife of a householder, wife of a chief minister, wife of a *brahmin*, and young girl. The proliferation of human forms is noteworthy because all of the forms added are *not* adult male elites, whereas the authors of *sūtras* in history are likely to have been adult male elites, considering that they were educated to read and write. It seems that the author or authors of Kumārajīva's version of the *Lotus Sūtra* took human differences more seriously and no longer saw adult male elites, such as *cakravartin* and *brahmin*, to be representative of the entire humankind. The expanded list of human forms seemed to suggest that the author or authors were sensitive to biological and social differences, recognizing the diversity of humans' life experiences and needs based on sex, age, and social status, and that therefore the list was expanded to include male and female, adult and children, and elite and common.

But why is there such a large number of non-human beings? It is worth repeating that the mythical forms clearly did not become a standardized repertoire; the non-human forms in the three lists vary, albeit there are overlaps. In other words, the authors did not just cite from a standardized list of mythical beings that everyone believed to exist, although some of the listed may be such beings. Some of the mythical beings are believed to be divine and lofty, such as King Brahmā, Śakrā, Īśvara, Maheśvara, Vaiśravaṇa, and Vajrapāṇi. Others are semi-divine and powerful and need to be propitiated because they exist on the peripheries of the human environment and may cause trouble in day-to-day life, such as *nāga*, *yaksa*, *gandharva*, *asura*, *garuda*, *kimnara*, and *mahoraga* in Kumārajīva's version. Robert DeCaroli, in *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*, notes many more types of beings in Indian popular religion and points out that, "Although some texts attempt to organize these beings by rank or classify them according to their qualities, no two classifications systems are the same, and rarely, if ever, do the narratives conform to these rubrics."¹⁰ What does it mean for those ancient Indian male adult human elites to include so many forms of existence even though the types of beings and the definitions of those beings were not conceived in the same way by all ancient Indians?¹¹ If the purpose of such a long list is simply to include as many different beings as possible, why are animals, insects, and plants *not* included?

The inclusion of at least some of such non-human beings can be read as the authors' way of signifying the kinds of human differences that are too far from the taken-for-granted norm in society to be considered part of the "human" group. Neither animals nor insects nor plants were included because the focal point was still the diversity of *human* experiences, even though the dominant elites did not consider those others to be "human" as they defined it. For example, the *gandharva* are depicted as a kind of male spirit that has superb musical skills, feeds on fragrance, and smells fragrance itself.¹² The *kimnara*, literally "How could this be human?", is a class of celestial musicians who are depicted either as horse-headed men or as woman-headed birds. They are said to love their partners intensely but bear no offspring.¹³ These mythical species could be the authors' ways of alluding to people with different sexual or gender identities. Some other mythical species could be referring to ethnic groups that live on the peripheries of the dominant group and can be either enemies or allies. For example, the *asura* is a kind of being that is consumed with jealousy and anger and constantly waging wars against *devas*.¹⁴ The *yaksa* is a class of nature spirit with

supernatural powers that can be harmless or menacing and may be depicted either as fierce, dwarf-like men, or as sensuous and sinuous women.¹⁵ The *nāga* species, depicted with human heads and torsos but with the tail and hood of a cobra and having the ability to masquerade as humans,¹⁶ may very well allude to the Nāga tribes in Nāgaland in the far northeastern corner of India.¹⁷ As such, mythical beings might be the dominant elites' ways of representing gender, sexual, and ethnic "others" who are so different from the norm that they are conceptualized as different species.

While it is impossible to corroborate why these mythical beings are included, Avalokiteśvara's transformation still exemplifies two important values when dealing with the fact of diversity: respect (self-respect as well as other-respect) and empathy. To say that Avalokiteśvara takes the forms of all kinds of beings is also to say that the *bodhisattva*'s infinite wisdom and boundless compassion can be found in people with all kinds of identities. Legends about the manifestations of Avalokiteśvara invariably recount that people encountered a person, thought it was just another man or woman of some diverse identity, and only after the act of rescue realized that they had been visited and helped by Avalokiteśvara.¹⁸ These legends reveal the teaching that, whoever one encounters, whether the "other" is one's equal or social superior or social inferior, that "other" may very well be Avalokiteśvara performing an identity. Avalokiteśvara's taking different forms is thus a call for respect for different kinds of people in the world, even if their difference from oneself is so great that they are conceptualized as belonging to a different species. The modern-day equivalents to those mythical beings include ethnic minorities and people of LGBTQ identities, for whom "dominant cultural beliefs and values furnish and perpetuate feelings of inadequacy, shame, confusion, and distrust."¹⁹ Avalokiteśvara's act of taking various forms without discrimination is a validation of the embodied existence of ethnic, gender, and sexual difference, as well as a reason for minorities to respect themselves. No matter how far from the "norm" someone's identity is, and no matter whether the identity category is constructed by oneself or imposed by others, that identity does not preclude the manifestation of the great Bodhisattva of Compassion. Identity markers have no bearing on the quality and potential of the person; every identity can be the *bodhisattva* and can have the same infinite wisdom and boundless compassion.

Sometimes the affirmation of differences can become a straightjacket for sexual and ethnic minorities, as many queer theorists and cultural theorists have noted. Cultural theorist Rey Chow, for example, points out that for the ethnic academic subject, "Her only viable option seems to be that of reproducing a specific version of herself – and her ethnicity – that has, somehow, already been endorsed and approved by the specialists of her culture."²⁰ In the West, non-Western ethnicities, and in fact all non-mainstream identities such as gender and sexual minorities, are managed "through the disciplinary promulgation of the supposed difference."²¹ Different identity groups are acknowledged, and to some extent allowed, insofar as those groups are internally homogenized and their supposed differences from the dominant group are fossilized. Identity politics frequently conflates and ignores intra-group differences while presupposing and amplifying intergroup ones.²² The supposed differences of non-mainstream identity groups are very often misunderstandings, exaggerations, wishful imaginations, or outright caricatures, and yet presumably every single person of a certain identity group shares those traits and *is* those traits, with no possibility of ever getting beyond them.

Avalokiteśvara's ability to transform indicates that identity is *not* a stable, fixed thing that a person is born with and can never transcend. To say that the *bodhisattva* can take all these forms is also to indicate that identity is performed and can be transcended. A person can transcend the

confinements of the supposed differences of any particular identity. The possibility of transcendence, however, does not at all suggest that minoritized or marginalized identities should be discarded for an identity that is presumably superior or more normal. At least the *Lotus Sūtra* does not say that Avalokiteśvara, after playing around with all these other identities, returns to one original form that is a mainstream elite male adult. In fact, the evolution of Avalokiteśvara's images in Buddhist history, from male to female and from singular to multiple, suggests at least some inchoate understanding that even the identity of an ancient Indian elite man needs to be transcended. Whether male or female, upper-class or lower-class, one's identity is socially and psychologically constructed and does not correlate with the level of liberation that a person is capable of achieving.²³ One has no ultimately fixed nature as defined by one's identity category, even though one may mistakenly identify oneself with a certain fixed identity.

This emphasis on the illusory nature of identity, however, can produce the unintended effect of dismissing the everyday sufferings of people with non-normative identities.²⁴ When "no-self" is emphasized to female listeners but the representation of enlightenment remains overwhelmingly male, it is in effect telling women that whatever sufferings they have experienced as women are not real and do not deserve attention from the perspective of (male) enlightened beings because their femaleness is not real. Likewise, when cultural diversity discourses deconstruct identity categories altogether but the dominant identities remain the norms in society, it can make minorities feel as if the sufferings they experience as minorities are not real and do not deserve attention because their minority identities are constructed. The manifestation of Avalokiteśvara in multiple forms represents a corrective to this inadvertent effect: Avalokiteśvara responds to the embodied sufferings of various beings and affirms their living realities and unique needs by taking their forms. The long list of mythical beings indicates that the author or authors of the *Lotus Sūtra* took note of a wide range of human differences, both the kinds so different that they have to be made into non-human species, and the kinds that were for a period of time subsumed under the norm of adult male elites but are still noticeably different in terms of sex, age, and social status. Different humans experience life differently and thus suffer in different ways, and Avalokiteśvara recognizes various sufferings caused by human differences and takes multiple forms to help different people, each trapped in their own identity (the identity of the dominant elites, insofar as it is fixed, is equally a trap). Ordinary people cannot change their physical forms to become the non-normative others and experience their day-to-day sufferings, but they can take others' forms in the sense of learning their perspectives, empathizing with their realities and needs, and seeking to alleviate their sufferings.

Avalokiteśvara's form-shifting points to a third possibility besides, on the one hand, identity politics that depend on the construction of monolithic identity groups based on biological makeup, with their supposed differences fossilized, and, on the other, cultural diversity discourses that have the tendency to deconstruct identity categories, sometimes to the point of disregarding or dismissing the everyday realities and sufferings with which minorities have to live and struggle.²⁵ While Avalokiteśvara's manifestation in different forms affirms the embodied existence of people of non-normative identities, Avalokiteśvara's ability to transform points to the possibility of moving beyond the confinements of any particular identity, whether normative or non-normative, and actively empathizing with multiple others.

A *bodhisattva* is an embodiment of wisdom and compassion. With wisdom, Avalokiteśvara dissolves differences and transcends identities, thus surpassing the notion of fixed identity. *Real-*

izing compassion, Avalokiteśvara embraces identities and affirms differences, thus celebrating diversity. Avalokiteśvara embraces diversity and at the same time transcend any singular identity. The transformation in multiple forms teaches us to respect and empathize with differences, whether the non-normative one is oneself or an “other.” For sexual and ethnic minorities, in particular, Avalokiteśvara’s transformation can be both a source of comfort and an inspiration for coping with reality in their current embodied identities.

NOTES

¹ Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., “Avalokiteśvara,” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 82–83.

² Taisho 9:262.

³ The 33 forms are Buddha, *pratyekabuddha*, *śrāvaka*, King Brahmā, Śakrā, Īśvara, Maheśvara, great general of heaven, Vaiśravana, petty king, elder, householder, chief minister, *brahmin*, *bhikṣu*, *bhikṣunī*, *upāsaka*, *upāsikā*, wife of an elder, wife of a householder, wife of a chief minister, wife of a *brahmin*, young boy, young girl, *deva*, *nāga*, *yaksa*, *gandharva*, *asura*, *garuda*, *kimnara*, *mahoraga*, and Vajrapāni.

⁴ Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶ Taishō 9:263.

⁷ The 17 forms are: Buddha, *bodhisattva*, *pratyekabuddha*, *śravaka*, King Brahmā, *gandharva*, ghost and spirit, the rich and the powerful, *deva*, *cakravartin*, *rakṣa*, general, *bhikṣu*, Vajrapāni, hermit, *rsi*, and student.

⁸ Hendrik Kern, trans., *The Lotus Sūtra: Saddharma Pundarīka Sūtra or the Lotus of the True Law* (Surrey, British Columbia: Eremitical Press, 2011), pp. 287–88. The 16 forms are: Buddha, *bodhisattva*, *pratyekabuddha*, *śravaka*, Brahmā, Indra, *gandharva*, goblin, Īśvara, Maheśvara, *cakravartin*, imp, Kubera, Senāpati, *brahmin*, and Vajrapāni.

⁹ See Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, “Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*,” in *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*, edited by Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 4–8, 24–30, and 51, note 2; Buswell and Lopez, “*Saddharmapu aṛikasūtra*,” in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 729–730; Damien Keown, “*Lotus Sūtra*,” in *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 158–59.

¹⁰ See Robert DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 10.

- ¹¹ DeCaroli, *Haunting the Buddha*, p. 12.
- ¹² Buswell and Lopez, “gandharva,” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, pp. 311–12; Keown, “gandharva,” *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 99; “Gandharva,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandharva>. Accessed June 18, 2014.
- ¹³ Buswell and Lopez, “kimnara,” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 436; Keown, “kimnara,” *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 142; “Kinnara,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kimnara>. Accessed June 18, 2014.
- ¹⁴ Buswell and Lopez, “asura,” in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 76; Keown, “asura,” *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 23; “Asura (Buddhism),” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asura_\(Buddhism\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asura_(Buddhism)). Accessed June 18, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Buswell and Lopez, “yaksa,” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 1018; Keown, “yaksa,” *Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 338; “Yaksha,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaksha>. Accessed June 18, 2014.
- ¹⁶ Buswell and Lopez, “nāga,” *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, p. 561; “Nāga,” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C4%81ga>. Accessed June 18, 2014.
- ¹⁷ “Naga people,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naga_people (accessed June 18, 2014)
- ¹⁸ For example, see Barbara E. Reed, “The Gender Symbolism of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 165.
- ¹⁹ Tracy L. Robinson-Wood, *The Convergence of Race, Ethnicity, and Gender: Multiple Identities in Counseling*, 3rd Edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2009), p. iv.
- ²⁰ Rey Chow, *Ethics After Idealism: Theory – Culture – Ethnicity – Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 117.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (July 1991): 1242.
- ²³ Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 8–10.
- ²⁴ There is, of course, not one form of sufferings experiences by all people bearing non-normative identities. For some accounts of various kinds of sufferings experienced by ethnic and cultural minorities, see Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, ed., *Dharma, Color, and Culture: New Voices in*

Western Buddhism (Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 2004). For some accounts of sufferings experienced by gender and sexual minorities, see Kenneth Oldfield and Richard Gregory Johnson III, eds., *Resilience: Queer Professors from the Working Class* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008).

25. See Rey Chow, "Is 'Woman' a Woman, a Man, or What? The Unstable Status of Woman in Contemporary Cultural Criticism," in *The Rey Chow Reader*, edited by Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 77-81; Mark Norris Lance and Alessandra Tanesini, "Identity Judgments, Queer Politics," *Radical Philosophy* 100 (March/April 2000): 42-51; Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, edited by Linda Nicholson (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 300-16; Suzanna Danuta Walters, "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (Or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)" *Signs* 21:4 (1996): 830-69; Marjorie Garber, "The Return to Biology," in *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 268-83; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Axiomatic," in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 22-48.

An Emerging Alliance: The Diverse Family Formation Bill and Buddhist Gender Justice in Taiwan

Chang Shen Shih

In September 2013, a bill drafted by civil unions to reform the civil marriage and family system – the Diverse Family Formation Bill (DFFB), which includes amendments to the Civil Code – was first sent to the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan for judicial review. This draft, whose amendments include same-sex marriage, a civil partnership system, adoption, and multi-person households – none of which are included in the present Civil Code – is the first and most radical marriage and family system reform bill in Asia. The bill provoked both strong support and strong opposition from society as well as religious groups, including an opposition march of nearly 100,000 people held on October 30, 2013, to maintain so-called family values.

This paper will discuss how Buddhists engaged in this debate on marriage and family reform, in an effort to explore the relationship between Buddhist ethics and sexual politics in contemporary Taiwan. I will use the most important representative among Buddhist voices – Bhiksuni Chao Hwei, who is the most socially active feminist nun in Taiwan – as well as other supporting and opposing Buddhist voices, to discuss the various positions Buddhists have taken in this debate. Bhiksuni Chao Hwei not only actively promotes this bill but also held Buddhist-style same-sex marriage ceremonies at Hong Shi Buddhist College in August 2012. These ceremonies, the first and most innovative Buddhist same-sex marriage ceremonies in history, will also be explored in this paper.

There is no significant conflict between religion and the feminist movement in Taiwan. However, since voices opposing sexual diversity reforms such as DFFB and same-sex marriage are from several specific religious groups, Chao Hwei's support and active engagement as a religious representative are particularly welcomed by social activists. In contrast to the views of earlier female Taiwanese Buddhists, who separated themselves from the feminist movement, this paper finds an emerging alliance between human rights in sexual politics and Buddhist gender justice in Taiwan.

Diverse Family Formation Bill and Its Discontents

Since 2012, the DFFB has been promoted by the Taiwan Alliance to Promote Civil Partnership Rights (TAPCPR), an NGO composed of several social groups promoting gender justice in Taiwan. TAPCPR claims that there have been many different forms of family existing in Taiwanese society other than the legally protected nuclear family form constituted by a heterosexual relationship and marriage contract. The state should not show preferential treatment toward the heterosexual nuclear family but should also provide legal protection to other forms of family, including the right to visitation during hospitalization, co-residence, property, housing, and so forth, and equally provide the basic human need of security. The DFFB is a reform bill that challenges heterosexual marriage hegemony as a social presumption. It requests the state to return the right of managing private life back to the citizens themselves, instead of privileging certain relationships on the basis of a particular ideology.

Since DFFB was sent to the Legislative Yuan in Taiwan for judicial review in September 2013, it has drawn much suspicion and opposition from certain sectors of society. DFFB is controversial because it challenges the social presumption that family is defined as a marriage

contract between one man and one woman. In addition, it would provide the legal structure for those in same-sex relationships or other relationships not based on sexual relationship (such as friends, spiritual practice groups, and care relations) to form family units. The opponents of DFFB formed an alliance called Protecting Family Alliance. The alliance is dominated by several Christian sects that have allied with other religious groups to organize press conferences and protest marches. On November 30, 2013, a 100,000-person opposition march against the DFFB was held in support of so-called “family values,” in sharp contrast to other social activist groups that promote human rights and pluralistic values.

Opposing voices are dominated by the Christian discursive assumption that God created one man and one woman and that therefore the marriage contract between one man and one woman should be protected by state laws universally.¹ Except for a few supportive voices, many Taiwanese Christians view homosexual acts as sinful. Other religious opponents reflect Chinese traditional values, mixing Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. Bhikkhu Jin Yao Shih, a Buddhist monk and social activist who teaches Buddhism in prisons and has promoted an anti-drug abuse campaign for many years, said:

Religion is the conscience of society. When society faces problems, religious groups are responsible to speak out. The formation of heaven and earth is naturally constituted by yin and yang, one man and one woman. If government passes bills that encourage homosexuality, it means that we want to change the natural law, which will influence the stability of society and causes negative effects.²

Chao Hwei and certain laypeople criticize Buddhist monastics and other groups who oppose DFFB by using the Daoist concept of yin/yang and traditional statements about marriage and family values such as “for the children’s future.” Chao Hwei derided Bhikkhu Jin Yao, asking, “Has Bhikshu Jing Yao become a Daoist or a master analyst of the *Yijing*?” Others criticize Jing Yao for misusing yin/yang theory and misleadingly equating men as yang and women as yin. Moreover, if Jing Yao is right about the yin/yang theory and heterosexual couples represents the natural law, why did he want to become a monk?³ Some people criticize those Buddhist monastics and groups who oppose DFFB, saying their views lack a doctrinal basis, express a lack of compassion toward a social minority, and are full of discrimination. In contrast to Christians, however, few Buddhist monastics and laypeople actively engage the DFFB issue, either to promote or oppose it. Most Taiwanese Buddhists detach themselves from social activism and dismiss the issue.

Chao Hwei’s Buddhist Discourse and Activism on Love, Desire, and Homosexuality

Chao Hwei, a professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Hsuan Chuang University and director of Hong Shi Buddhist College, is famous for promoting gender justice in Buddhism in addition to feminism, animal rights, and environmentalism – all prominent social issues in Taiwan since the 1990s. In 2012, Chao Hwei presided over Taiwan’s first same-sex Buddhist wedding ceremony and offered Hong Shi Buddhist College as the wedding place. With Buddhist chanting playing in the background, two female same-sex couples wore veils and white gowns, knelt in front of the Buddha image, exchanged Buddhist beads instead of rings, made vows, and stamped their

seals on a marriage document in front of more than 200 people. These two lesbian Buddhist couples wanted to have a Buddhist wedding to acknowledge their own faith, the predominant religion in Taiwan, and to encourage society to accept same-sex marriage.⁴ This event drew a great deal of international media attention from channels such as CNN, BBC, and NBC news, as well as local media coverage. The event was included in the 2012 The Year in Pictures issue of the *New York Times*.

On the DFFB issue, Chao Hwei publicly promotes this marriage and family reform and considers it not only as a movement promoting equal marriage rights, but also a movement promoting human rights and anti-discrimination. Chao Hwei is erudite in Buddhism and connects it to social engagement. Instead of examining specific passages of *vinaya* texts, Chao Hwei applies the Buddhist doctrines of the Middle Path, dependent arising, and the ethical principle of protecting life to questions such as women's rights, homosexuality, marriage, and family. Some people in the general society use the argument of "defending family values" to oppose same-sex marriage. To them, love and desire are judged according to "social norms" to be categorized in dichotomous terms of normal or abnormal, majority or minority, or mainstream or non-mainstream. In comparison, Buddhists who oppose same-sex marriage use Buddhist jargon, such as "sexual misconduct" and "karmic obstacle" to legitimize their opposition. According to Chao Hwei, social norms are made by causes and conditions, and they inevitably change over time. From the point of view of Buddhadharma, what counts as sexual misconduct or abnormal desire should be based on whether or not it causes harm to oneself and others. This principle is known as the "method of self-mastery" (or "the Dharma of taking oneself as the measure"), which is based on compassion.⁵ Rape, sexual assault, and harassment are forms of sexual misconduct because they harm other people.⁶

On the issue of same-sex desire, after the same-sex Buddhist wedding ceremony presided over by Chao Hwei, opposing voices made accusations such as the following: "According to the *vinaya*, a monastic should not be close to abnormal males or females such as those who are castrated, transvestite, intersex, or homosexual"; "Monastics should not engage in worldly things such as promoting same-sex marriage. A person who does so is not detached from vexations and will not attain liberation"; and "personal action cannot represent the Buddhist community."⁷ In Buddhist communities, voices opposing homosexuality often use karmic obstacles such as sexual misconduct or the *vinaya* codes, such as rules excluding certain people from ordination, to condemn homosexuality. Well-versed in the *vinaya*, Chao Hwei states that homosexuality is not prohibited in the *vinaya* and uses Buddhist doctrine to deconstruct those labels on same-sex desires:

What is the causality that makes gays have more karmic obstacles? Is killing, stealing, prostitution, or lying – bad karma that someone did in a past life – the cause of becoming gay or lesbian? In contrast, what we see is that gays and lesbians are in good physical and mental states and enjoy themselves as long as society does not discriminate, oppress, give them stress, and make them suffer. What gives gays and lesbians obstacles is not their sexual orientation, but the discrimination and social pressures from heterosexual hegemony.⁸

For Chao Hwei, from a Buddhist perspective, to consider heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as abnormal is misleading. Under the heterosexual hegemony, the majority is deemed mainstream and normal whereas the homosexual minority is deemed abnormal. Yet heterosexuality

and homosexuality are both forms of desire and there is no distinction between sacred and evil, or blessed and cursed between them. Both heterosexuality and homosexuality are associated with physical and mental attachment. Both can hurt oneself and others if someone becomes overwhelmed by desire or has an exclusivistic attitude. In both, desire can be controlled, for example, through remaining faithful to one's partner or by practicing control (such as the practice of celibacy). Both heterosexual and homosexual desires can be transformed or transcended by developing universal compassion. Therefore, accusations and discrimination against same-sex desire by heterosexuals are simply "the pot calling the kettle black."

Other Supportive Buddhist Voices

Influenced by sexual politics in contemporary society, the issue of homosexuality in Buddhism is an ongoing debate. Buddhists in Chinese and other Asian societies tend to remain silent on the issue of homosexuality or see it as falling into the categories of sexual misconduct or karmic obstacles. In some cases, they even ban those who are gay or lesbian from becoming monastics. Chao Hwei's active support for same-sex marriage is unusual. Buddhists and others in Taiwanese society who support same-sex marriage compliment her compassion and bravery.⁹ In Taiwan, Master Hsing Yun, the founder of Buddha's Light International Association, the largest Chinese Buddhist organization in the world, is also gay-friendly and states that homosexuality is not sexual misconduct. Paralleling Chao Hwei's arguments, which draw on Buddhist doctrine instead of *vinaya* texts, Hsing Yun argues that what counts as sexual misconduct is conduct that harms or violates others, or that breaks the laws of the society in which one is living. Homosexuality is neither right nor wrong, but is an aspect of people's private lives and an individual concern. The Dharma teaches us to learn to be tolerant of the behaviors of others, so as to "accept all kinds of people and help all kinds of people discover the wisdom of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha."¹⁰ Though accepting of same-sex desire, Hsing Yun is not a social activist and does not further challenge the so-called "laws of society," since social norms naturally change over time.

Another supportive voice in the debate over DFFR is that of Jin-Ke Wen, a lay Buddhist and journalist who uses profound Buddhist doctrine to discuss Buddhist ethics related to the family. To Wen, Buddhism is not like other religions that conceive of ethics in terms of what is holy or ultimately true; instead, Buddhist ethics is conceived in terms of conventional existence, which is rooted in attachments, controls, and entanglements among people. Therefore, Buddhism encourages renunciation of the family as a way to attain liberation from worldly attachments. As a worldly institution, families are formed by causes and conditions, and are therefore characterized by unsatisfactoriness (*duhkha*), impermanence (*anitya*), and non-self (*anatman*). According to Buddhist ethics, the institutions and social norms related to the family arise through an understanding of their conventional and temporary existence and therefore vary according to the times and culture in different societies, ideally for the benefit of sentient being. They should not be conceived as fixed. Therefore, Wen states, Buddhist renunciation is rooted in a value system that is associated with liberation from worldly existence, but the DFFR is rooted in a value system that confirms conventional affection and responsibility, and aims to provide legal protections in a post-industrial society that recognizes a plurality of genders and sexualities.¹¹

An Emerging Alliance

In discussing the gender identity of nuns in Taiwanese Buddhism, Yu-chen Li contends that Buddhist nuns accord more with religious doctrine more than feminist thought in relation to women's rights movements in society.¹² In comparison, DeVido illustrates that Taiwanese nuns distinguish themselves from western influences in their "self-awareness" and "fight" for gender equality in the women's rights movement in Taiwan. Nuns in Taiwan are self-reliant, self-administered, highly talented, and hard-working, yet they do not consider themselves to be feminists. There are a few exceptions, such as Shih Chao Hwei and Shih Xing Guang, who call themselves Buddhist feminists and thereby consider themselves to be working for the good of society at large. Nevertheless, the younger generation of Buddhist nuns under 40 or 50 might well align themselves with feminist ideas in Taiwan. Some of them even have a women's studies background or have studied gender in universities.¹³

On the issue of DFFB, we can see that in contrast to the views of earlier Taiwanese Buddhists who separate themselves from the feminist movement, more and more Buddhists publicly engage in sexual politics and support same-sex marriage and feminism by using Buddhist doctrine as their discourse. Since most opponents of reform are from religious groups, Chao Hwei's support and activism based on her religious background are especially welcomed by social activists. We can see an emerging alliance between human rights advocates in sexual politics and Buddhist gender justice in Taiwan. Through years of promoting gender justice within the Buddhist community and human rights in society at large, Chao Hwei has made significant contributions to this emerging alliance in Taiwan.

NOTES

¹ "Controversial Pastoral Letter against Same-sex Marriage is Temporarily Moved through Referendum." *Taiwan Church News Network*, April 30th, 2014. <http://www.tcn.org.tw/news-detail.php?nid=6856> (Accessed May 19, 2014)

² Shih Chao Hwei, "Response to Shih Jing Yao's Anti-TAPCPR," *Hongshi Newsletter* 125, October 2014, p. 71.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Yui-shuan Cheng, "Beautiful Rainbow Falls on the Mundane: Records of a Buddhist Same-sex Wedding," *Hongshi Newsletter* 119, October 2013, p. 6–13.

⁵ Chao Hwei interprets how to practice the "method of self-mastery" as follows: "It is to share the feelings of other sentient beings in accordance with our own feelings. Hence, we respect that it is the nature of sentient beings to love their lives and fear death, to wish for happiness and to avoid suffering." Chao-hwi Shih, *Buddhist Normative Ethics* (Taoyuan, Taiwan: Dharmadhatu Publications, 2014), p. 114.

⁶ Shih Chao Hwei, "Affection and Desire: From A Buddhist Perspective," *Chinese Sex(uality)/Gender-Age Machine*, ed. Wen-Cong Zhao (Taipei, Roundtable Publishing, 2011), p. 69–107.

⁷ Message Board of Talk News, Public Television Service, "First Time in the History of Buddhism: Buddha Witnesses Same-sex Wedding!" http://talk.news.pts.org.tw/2012/08/blog-post_13.html. Accessed May 23, 2014/

⁸ Shih, "Affection and Desire," p. 102.

⁹ Peter Jackson, "Thai Buddhist Accounts of Male Homosexuality and AIDS in the 1980s," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 6:3(1995)140–53. Since the 1990s, the Dalai Lama, based on interpretations of Tibetan *vinaya* scriptures, has opposed gay and lesbian sex and even non-procreative heterosexual sex, such as oral sex, anal sex, and masturbation, but only for sexual misconduct among Buddhists. He considers that those forms of sex are acceptable for non-believers. However, his views on the subject appear to have evolved over the years. He came out in support of gay marriage personally and stated he considers it a personal matter during a Larry King show in 2014. At the same time, he still holds the position that believers should not violate the precepts of their religion, including those pertaining to sexual misconduct, and leaves same-sex marriage to local law. Please see Don Lattin, "Dalai Lama Speaks on Gay Sex: He says it's wrong for Buddhists but not for society." *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 11, 1997. "The Dalai Lama Says Gay Marriage Is OK During Larry King Interview," *The Huffington Post*, March 6, 2014.

¹⁰ Hsing Yun, *Buddhism: Pure and Simple* (Boston: Weatherhill Publisher, 2001), p. 137–38.

¹¹ Jin-Ke Wen, "Renunciation in Buddhism and Human Diverse Family Formation," *Restorative Justice Connection E-newspaper* 13, January 14, 2014. <http://rjonline333.pixnet.net/blog/post/102924463>. Accessed April 17, 2014.

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¹³ Elise Anne DeVido, "Buddhism, Women, and Civil Society in Taiwan, Buddhism, Women, and Civil Society in Taiwan," 2003. <http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-NX012/nx059177.htm>. Accessed August 30, 2013.

A Narrative Analysis of Buddhist Discourse on Gay Marriage in Taiwan: A Case Study of Master Chao Hwei

Chih Yin Shih

Bhiksuni Chao Hwei was born in Myanmar on May 28, 1957. When she was ten, her family migrated to Taiwan in the midst of an anti-Chinese riot in Myanmar. She later studied Chinese Literature in the esteemed National Normal University of Taiwan. While in the sophomore year, she attended a summer camp in Foguangshan (Buddha Light Mountain) and thus began her relationship with Buddhism. She entered the *sangha* a year later.¹

At the age of 27, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei had the opportunity to study under the renowned reform monk Bhiksu Yin Shun who perhaps had the greatest impact on post-war Buddhism in Taiwan.² The influence of Bhiksu Yin Shun on Bhiksuni Cho Hwei is profound: she has since claimed to follow the ideal of “Buddhism for the Human Realm” (*renjian fojiao*), an ideal Bhiksu Yin Shun propagates.³ At the age of 32, she founded an organization for the purpose of protecting Buddhism from the Chinese culture’s common abuse on Buddhist nuns, sexism within Buddhist tradition, etc.⁴ Most talked about event in her pursuit of gender equality in Buddhist tradition was her “Abolishing the Eight Special Rules (*Gurudhamma*)” manifesto that was read out in a conference on March 31, 2001. It is claimed by some supporters to be an event that shook the sexist foundation in Buddhist tradition.⁵ In 1989, she threw herself into her first social activism when she took up the cause to save a man whom was seen by some as unjustifiably sent to death penalty.⁶

Interviews with the Brides

By the time Bhiksuni Chao Hwei married two lesbian in her temple on the August 11, 2012, she was already a well-known social activist. She engages in various social movements, such as animal rights, gender equality, protests against nuclear power plants and casinos, and, of course, in support of the legalization of same-sex marriage. Among the photos in the *New York Times*’ “2012: The Year in Pictures” is a photo of the same-sex Buddhist wedding hosted by Bhiksuni Chao Hwei.⁷ This is only one of many examples of the media attention the wedding attracted. On the internet, one may still find video recordings of the wedding taken by foreign correspondents.⁸ In the brides’ narrative of the wedding, the media sensation began as an unexpected surprise.

One of the brides, Huang Meiyu, records, “We did not know Dharma Master [Chao Hwei] beforehand. We only communicated with her twice on Facebook before she agreed to marry us.” Because Huang gained the approval of the Buddhist group that she belonged to, she thought of asking the well-known social activist Bhiksuni Chao Hwei.⁹ Here, the Huang’s narrative suggests that same-sex marriage is not supported by every segment of the Buddhist community and that being married by Bhiksuni Chao Hwei was a last resort.

Although same-sex marriage is not legal in Taiwan, both Huang and You considered having a formal wedding important. One reason was to gain recognition from each other’s families. Huang notes that, “Before our marriage, nobody took us seriously, especially our families. Even though we had been dating for more than six years and we had met each other’s parents, people still thought it was a temporary fling. They would still say, “Don’t waste your time anymore. Find a man and get married. Don’t be like this anymore.”¹⁰ Yating You says, “Because of this wedding, my family met

her and had a meal together. This was a big breakthrough for me. My relatives are also slowly coming to term with [our marriage].”¹¹

In an interview with Guo Ding Shih, both brides reveal that the pressure they encountered from their families was the main reason they hesitated to have a formal wedding.¹² This was especially true for You Yating, who had been close to her mother as a child. After the wedding gain widespread media attention, her mother felt pressure from the extended family as members became aware of her daughter’s homosexuality. You’s mother began to exclude her from extended family gatherings and that upset her. However, the widely publicized wedding also gave You a sense of new-found freedom. Towards the end of the interview, she says,

“Ever since the wedding, I have no longer concealed my identity. I can freely and honestly tell people certain things now. It’s just wonderful! No need to conceal a part of me. I had never felt so at ease as I did at this year’s gay pride parade. I was so happy. This wedding gives me lot of strength.”

Huang and Guo recognize the significance of their very public Buddhist wedding. Huang says, “Our Buddhist teacher gave us lots of courage during this period. He kept encouraging us [by saying], ‘This is about our faith in Dharma. If we don’t get to the roots of the matter, it will hinder our spiritual practice’ and ‘This is no longer about you; this is about everyone.’” Because of this, I’m willing to stand out, to say something more, to gain more rights for the gay/lesbian community. The whole thing gives us a lot of strength.”

Not all their encounters with the Buddhist community have been encouraging. You records an upsetting incident at a Buddhist temple:

For some reason the teacher paid special attention to homosexuality that day and declared homosexuality to be unwholesome. I felt very upset upon hearing that. He said, in private, “One of you plays the male role and the other plays the female role.” That’s not how I understand homosexuality; there is no gender role play.¹³

Huang, who has been Buddhist for a longer time, takes a more proactive stand. She emphasizes,

I don’t want anyone to tell me [homosexuality] is wrong because I don’t believe it’s wrong. Before we got married, there was a monastic said that [homosexuality] is unwholesome during a sermon. I said, this monastic is wrong. You should go and tell him that he is wrong; Buddhism is not like that. Hypothetically speaking, if we eventually find a [Buddhist] *sutra* [that disapproved of homosexuality], we would be very sad. But I know that’s not possible.¹⁴

As a social worker who works with drug addicts for a Buddhist NGO, Huang often has to deal with the question of karma and she extends her thinking to the question of sexuality:

Dharma Master A said that since we were born here and also met here, it means our karma is more or less the same. If a client with low self-esteem asked me, “Do I have more bad karma?” I would say, “The truth is, our karma is more or less the same.” Some people say that [being homosexual is] an unfortunate rebirth,” but I would say, “No. [Life] is diverse.” That’s right! Our existence is diverse in itself.¹⁵

Overall, both Huang and You describe the wedding experience as positive and empowering. Their narratives of their wedding experience suggest that while not all Buddhists approve of homosexuality, their faith in the Buddhist Dharma helps them to cope with homophobia. Huang and You may not have wanted media publicity for their wedding, but they now recognize the benefit of publicity and use it to advocate for gay/lesbian welfare.

The Narrative of Bhiksuni Chao Hwei

When Bhiksuni Chao Hwei conducted the wedding of two women, she initiated a debate about Buddhism and homosexuality in Taiwan.¹⁶ Media reports suggest that while some find it shocking, there has been a generally positive reaction to her marrying two lesbians.¹⁷ Contrary to the brides' narratives about the wedding, which are more personal, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei's narrative about the same wedding is a more doctrinal discussion.

One finds that Bhiksuni Chao Hwei argued for sexual equality long before she presided over the same-sex wedding in 2012. For example, she discusses Buddhist perspective on homosexuality in a 1996 article:

Heterosexuality and homosexuality are both sensual lust and hence share the same characteristics – both are animal instinct, both are without the distinction between being sacred and sinned, and both are without being blessed or cursed. They are the same lust that tie the mind and body into knots. They are both subject to the danger of indulgence that might cause harm to oneself or to others. They are both capable of spiritual abstinence or being faithful to one's spouse. They are both capable of transforming or transcending [the sexual relationship] into something greater. To abuse, discriminate against or to question homosexuality from a heterosexual perspective is [mere ignorance].¹⁸

In this article, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei argues that sensual lust is bad for anyone on the spiritual path and needs to be properly controlled if one is a householder. It follows that homosexuality is not something that needs to be suppressed or cured. After all, both heterosexuality and homosexuality both involve sensual lust that based on ignorance. Buddhist values equality for all beings and does not distinguish between the sacred and profane.

Bhiksuni Chao Hwei stresses that, "There is nowhere in the Buddhist texts that definitely condemn homosexuality. Since according to Buddhist doctrine homosexuality and heterosexuality have the same essence, sensual lust, there is no difference between the two."¹⁹ Given her long involvement in the fight for human rights and gender justice, it was no surprise that she married a lesbian couple, Huang Meiyu and You Yating, on August 11, 2012. Supporters praise this as exemplifying Bhiksuni Chao Hwei's activism for Buddhism in the human realm and equality for all beings.²⁰

After the wedding, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei was asked why she was willing to marry two lesbians, an act that is highly controversial and may not be agreed upon by Buddhist establishment. Bhiksuni Chao Hwei's answer once again shows her emphasis on Buddhist doctrine to argue for gay/lesbian rights:

Buddhism believes that everything is interdependently-conditioned. There is no distinction between the superior and inferior. From a Buddhist perspective, there is no distinction between the sacred and profane. Heterosexuals and homosexuals face the same challenges. The Buddha taught the equality for all beings. I didn't actively seek to preside at a Buddhist wedding, but since two Buddhist women made such a request, I just went along with it.²¹

Here, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei cites the Buddhist concept of interdependence (*pratītya-samutpāda*) to argue for same-sex marriage.

Other Buddhist concepts are also applied to legitimize her stand on same-sex marriage: “When I see [things] from the perspective of Middle Path wisdom, I keep in mind the core of an issue and view it clearly. People tend to judge difference from their own perspective. It is not fair and not Middle Path wisdom. Whether it is homosexuals or other beings, I cannot judge them from my own cultural standpoint or it would be distorted.... Buddhism talks about equality for all beings. No life wants to be hurt and all living beings want to be respected. Since one yearns for respect, one should also respect others. [The lesbian brides] didn't hurt anyone. If you simply don't like a woman marrying another woman, that's your own personal bias.”²²

In a respond to some Taiwanese Buddhists' objections to same-sex marriage, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei refutes those objections by pointing out that their argument is Chinese and non-Buddhist. She asked, “Dharma Master, since when did the Buddha become an Yijing master? When did the Buddha ever say, ‘The formation of Earth and Heaven is based on yin and yang, man and woman?’ When did that become a basic rule? Have you changed careers and become a Daoist priest?”²³ Bhiksuni Chao Hwei challenges her opponents by stressing that, since her opponents cannot find statements in Buddhist doctrine that oppose homosexuality, it follows that their objections are not of a Buddhist nature.

Conclusion

Perhaps because Bhiksuni Chao Hwei had already discussed the issue of Buddhism and homosexuality before she famously performed a same-sex wedding in 2012, one does not find her offering much academic discourse about the issue after the wedding. Based on her pre-wedding essays and post-wedding interviews, it appears that her discussion of the issue tends to focus on Buddhist concepts of dependent arising and the Middle Path. For her, because the Buddha taught the equality of all beings, objections against homosexuality are not Buddhist in nature.

By contrast, the narratives of the two brides in the famous same-sex wedding of August 2012 focus more on personal experience rather than on points of doctrine. For them, having a formal wedding was to reaffirm their relationship and to gain acceptance from their families. Because they were both Buddhists, having a Buddhist wedding was important for them.

A comparison of the narratives about the same-sex Buddhist wedding given by Bhiksuni Chao Hwei and the two brides reveals a fundamental difference. For the brides, a Buddhist wedding enhanced their lesbian identity, allowed them to be honest about themselves, and enriched their relationship, whereas for Bhiksuni Chao Hwei, the wedding realized the Buddhist ideal of equality for all beings. Presiding at a same-sex wedding might be controversial, but by so doing, Bhiksuni Chao Hwei forced Buddhists to rethink their self-image: Are we, as Buddhists, really following the

Buddha's teachings, especially the concepts of dependent arising and equality for all beings? If so, why should we oppose homosexuality and same-sex marriage?

NOTES

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¹² Guo Ding Shih, "An Interview," op cit.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jia Nai Wang, “Chao Hwi Shih Talks about the First Buddhist Same-sex Marriage in Buddhism History,” Chinese Public Television News, <http://pnn.pts.org.tw/main/2012/08/16>. Accessed June 23, 2014.

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¹⁸ Chao Hwei Shih, “‘Gay’ Do They Inherit a Yoke of Guilt?” *Buddhist Hong Shi College* 83, August 26, 1996.

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²⁰ Dong, “Coming Out and Internal Matters,” p. 48.

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Buddhism and Sexual Diversity in Germany

Rotraut (Jampa) Wurst

In 2009, when I first read the letters LGBTQ on the Call for Papers of the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women that was held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, I could only guess that the “L” stood for lesbian. I did not know the meaning of the other letters and thought the “B” stood for Buddhist. Soon I learned that the acronym LGBTQQI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersexual people. Despite my failure to understand the acronym, I thought it would be good to talk about different sexualities at a Buddhist conference, because surely Buddhism has much to say about human differences and surely the Buddhist point of view would be welcome in confronting the prejudices and ill will that people with diverse lifestyles encounter. For this reason, I thought it would be good to do some research on Buddhism and sexual diversity in Germany,” the country where I live. The focus of this paper is lesbian Buddhist women and their views about living as lesbian Buddhist women in Germany.

Germany is located in Europe, in the so-called Western world, where people who are interested in different religions or philosophies like Buddhism are still considered somewhat strange. Coming from a Christian family, I first studied Protestant Theology, then later Comparative Studies in Religion and other disciplines. I learned that women are not as respected as men, whether at universities or in the Christian church. Even talking about a feminist perspective in seminars met considerable resistance from certain professors. Some may think that I am exaggerating. Many people assume that in the West, in Europe in particular, gender equality is a given. But women and men in the West still do not get equal pay for equal work, they do not have the same career opportunities, and promotions for women are just words that politicians use before elections. People may think that because Germany has a woman chancellor, that indicates a high level of gender equality in German society. But Angela Merkel is an exception and it would take an entirely different paper to explain all the conditions that have made her the chancellor. Suffice it to say that social justice is still a big topic in Germany, even in the 21st century, especially when it comes to gender justice.

During my years of feminist studies, I came in contact with a Christian lesbian network. This was in the 1980s and several books had been published about feminist theology and about lesbian Christian women.¹ Interestingly, the women in this network were very much interested in Buddhism and meditation. Many of them thought that Buddhism offers more inclusion and acceptance, because Buddhism teaches that all beings are equal. For them, that meant that there would be no prejudice against women in general and no prejudice against lesbian women in particular. However, it took a long time for lesbian women in Germany who are Buddhists to think about coming out as lesbians or about founding a network to talk about their lives and the prejudices they are confronted with. It also took a long time for them to begin exchanging information about the Buddhist traditions, centers, and teachers that make them feel accepted as women who live with a female partner or who do not want to live with a male partner.

In 1997, a women’s conference with the strange title “Was ist cool an Buddha?“ (“What makes Buddha cool?”) was held at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. At this conference, which was organized by the Institute for Comparative Studies in Religion, scholars and teachers of Buddhism came together to discuss why Buddhism is still interesting to people nowadays. I was

invited to talk about “Aufgaben und Zielsetzungen im Westen” (“Duties and Goals in the West”), which was a lecture about Sakyadhita in the West, especially my work in Germany for Sakyadhita International between 1995 and 1997. At this conference, I had some conversations with lesbian Buddhist women who were very shy, but thought they could talk with me. At that time, they still did not feel comfortable enough to form a network. But in 2000, such a network, called the Network of Lesbians and Buddhism (NLUB), was finally founded. Still, it was not until 2008 that the word “lesbian” appeared for the first time in the program at a Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, when the American author Sandy Boucher mentioned the word in a talk about American Buddhist women at the 10th Sakyadhita conference in Mongolia.

The Network of Lesbians and Buddhism

It has been debated whether or not it is a good idea to form a Network of Lesbians and Buddhism (NLUB). Some people feel that forming a special group is like placing oneself in a ghetto. On the other hand, it is understandable that lesbian women wish to have a network where they feel safe. The NLUB network is an open group of lesbians who are interested in Buddhism. It was formed during the congress on Frauen und Buddhismus (Women and Buddhism) in Cologne, due to the perceived need to make lesbians visible among Buddhists, and to connect and to support them. Since its formation, members of this network have been talking about feminist ideas, critiquing the male hierarchy, and brainstorming about possible ways to make changes in Buddhism, using means such as workshops, meditations, and simply spreading ideas. During the last few years, they have founded several regional groups in different parts of Germany.

The women of NLBU have been very shy in terms of connecting with other groups, due to the bad experiences they have had in the past. Around 2012, they made some timid attempts to connect with the Christian Lesbian Network in Bad Boll, in southern Germany. This was ten years after I encouraged them to do so when I presented a paper at one of their conferences in 2002.²

What Do Buddhist Texts Tell Us?

For men deeply entrenched in gender hierarchy, whether in Christianity or in Buddhism, it is always difficult when women begin to think, write, and speak out. If women also out themselves as lesbians living with a female partner or even married to another woman, male-centered society is stunned. According to the Sri Lankan scholar Hema Goonatilake, in the Theravada Buddhist literature, “the Buddha recognized the prevalence of homosexual and other deviational sexual activity as a matter of fact.”³ She says that “punishments meted out to monks and nuns for homosexual and other deviational offences are less severe than for heterosexual offences.” In her opinion, “This fact demonstrates that the Buddhist attitude to homosexuality was more liberal and lax than towards heterosexuality.” Tolerance toward lesbians and gay men is still evident among Buddhist nuns. Nowadays when I do fieldwork among Tibetan Buddhist nuns, they always send their greetings to my wife.⁴

In Buddhism, when we talk about physical, verbal, and mental misconduct, we mean conduct that harms or disrespects others through body, speech, and mind. What is important is mindful, non-harmful behaviors. Beyond that, every person has to decide for herself or himself how she or he

wants to live. For sure, sensuality is a hindrance on the path to enlightenment that eventually has to be overcome.⁵ In the *vinaya*, nuns and monks are expected to avoid homosexual practices just as they are expected to avoid heterosexual practices. For laypeople, however, the Buddha accepted that sensuality is a matter of fact in human life. The point of concern is not whether a woman lives with a man, a man with a man, or a woman with a woman, and it does not really matter whether the relationship is one of monogamy, polygyny, or polyandry, as occurred in Tibet.

Even for monastics, as Goonatilake points out, an “absolute absence of incidents of homosexuality in monasteries is too good to believe The reality is that there is some laxity towards homosexuality, and lesbianism, not only in Buddhist monasteries, but also in society in general. Thus far, it has remained a non-issue.”

Interviews and Conversations with Lesbian Buddhist Women and Teachers

Whether or not homosexuality is really a “non-issue” in Buddhist texts, in Germany there are still many people who think lesbians and gays should go to a psychiatrist or receive therapy to make themselves “normal.” There are also doctors and therapists who make a profit from that idea. It is true that in Germany some years ago, there was a male Minister for Foreign Affairs who was married to a man. It is also true that the current mayor of Berlin outed himself to media, saying “Yes, I am gay, and it is good as it is.” But such cases of public acceptance are rare and there are also many examples of intolerance.

Same sex marriage is possible in Germany, but it is called “partnership.” Same-sex couples still do not have the same rights and are not accepted in the same way that heterosexual couples are. There are certainly no same-sex weddings that are officiated by Buddhist monastics like those performed in Taiwan by the social activist Bhiksuni Chao-Hwei.⁶

I found it difficult to conduct formal interviews with Buddhist lesbians, whether or not they are teachers. All the Buddhist lesbians I attempted to speak with were reluctant to be interviewed. Fearful of the consequences, they politely said they were sorry but they had no time. Eventually, I either conducted interviews by email or had untaped conversations that I wrote down from memory later on. I also had to promise these women that I would respect their privacy by not revealing their identities. For this reason, I will only summarize their answers here, without mentioning specific details. Their answers were mostly vague and similar to each other’s. When I asked what Buddhism has to say about sexual preference, they either said it is not relevant or gave me no answer at all.

When I asked whether Buddhist lesbians tend to have a special focus or different interpretations when reading Buddhist texts and what Buddhism means in their lesbian partnership (if they are in a partnership), I received only general responses, such as “May all beings be happy!” or “There is more patience and less ‘ego’ in lesbian Buddhist partnerships.”

When I asked questions about misogynistic statements in Buddhist texts and about living as a minority in a largely Christian society as a member of a minority religion (Buddhism), a minority sexual identity (homosexual), and a minority gender (woman), I received no answers. When I asked about the social and political meaning of being a lesbian Buddhist in a Western, Christian society, even as a lesbian Buddhist teacher, the most common answer was “That is no issue.” But, to my mind, living as a minority is an important issue of social justice. Otherwise, there would be nothing to fear in discussing these questions. These questions are not relevant simply to Buddhists; they are

social and political questions. For example, “What does it mean to live in the West, in a democracy, living freely as a lesbian and as a Buddhist?”

The conclusions I have drawn from these interviews are not entirely positive. On the one hand, there are still many prejudices against lesbians, given the Christian background of German society, even though homosexual partnerships are legally accepted. On the other hand, sadly, there is a lack of knowledge or careful examination of the Buddhist texts, particularly on these issues. This means that there is still much to be done in Germany concerning social and political injustices towards women and especially lesbians in society. What is primarily needed is to educate people about Buddhism, whether they are heterosexual or LGBTQQI. A more thorough analysis of prejudices against LGBTTTQI people from a Buddhist point of view is also needed and that will require further research.

One final thought is this: I think we should not speak about “diversity,” but about equality – that is, equal rights and opportunities. As H. H. the Dalai Lama says, “Every sentient being wants to achieve happiness and to avoid suffering.” That hold true for all beings, whether they live in a partnership or not, and no matter what kind of partnership they choose.

NOTES

¹ For example, see Monika Barz, Ute Leistner, and Herta Wild, *Hättest du gedacht, dass wir so viele sind?* (Did you think there were so many of us?) (Zurich: Kreuz Verlag, 1987); Monika Barz, Ute Leistner, and Herta Wild, eds., *Lesbische Frauen in der Kirche* (Lesbian women in the Church) (Zurich: Kreuz Verlag, 1993); and Rosemary Keefe Curb and Nancy Manahan, eds., *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence* (Midway, FL: Spinsters Ink, 1985.)

² Rotraut Wurst, “Sexuelle Präferenz: Hindernis oder Chance auf dem Pfad zur Buddhaschaft (Sexual Preference: Hindrance or Opportunity on the Path to Buddhahood?” Paper presented at the Network Lesben und Buddhismus (Network of Lesbians and Buddhism), Charlottenberg, Germany, 2002.

³ Hema Goonatilake, “Buddhist Attitude to Homosexuality in Early Theravāda Buddhist Literature,” Paper presented at the Heinrich Boell Foundation’s Women and Religion Symposium, Siem Reap, 2000; and L. P. N. Perera, *Sexuality In Ancient India: A Study Based On The Pali Vinayapitaka* (Kelaniya, Sri Lanka: Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, 1993), pp. 125–37.

⁴ Rotraut Wurst, *Identität im Exil: Tibetisch-Buddhistische Nonnen und das Netzwerk Sakyadhita* (Identity in Exile. Tibetan Buddhist Nuns and the Network Sakyadhita) (Berlin: Reimer, 2001).

⁵ Majjihima Nikaya I, 433; Hema Goonatilake, “Buddhist Attitude to Sex,” Paper presented at the Heinrich-Boell Foundation’s Women and Religion Symposium, Istanbul, 1999.

⁶ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/13/taiwan-same-sex-wedding-photos_n_1773086.html

The *pātimokka* is the core of the disciplinary code for the *sangha* community. The complete *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas* of six different schools are extant. The Mahāsaṅgika, Theravāda, Mahiśāsaka, Sarvāstivāda, Dharmaguptaka, and Mūlasarvāstivāda are the schools which have complete *ubhato* (two-fold), meaning they contain both the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas*. Most of the *vinaya* rules in the *pātimokkas* of these schools are held in common, but there are numerical differences between the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas* of all six schools. The purpose of this research is to identify the reasons for these differences, using textual analysis of the *Theravāda bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas*. My methodology is a textual analysis of documents pertaining to the *ubhato vibhanga* and *ubhato pātimokka* of the Theravāda school.

Background

Historical evidence shows that the *pātimokka* for the *sangha* community was finalized during the first three centuries after the Buddha's *parinibbanā*. The *Pancasathikaskhandaka* states that first Council finalized the *ubhato* (two-fold) *vibhanga*,¹ but it does not give a detailed description about the contents of the *ubhato vibhanga*. In the same *khandaka*, the monks of the Council describe the *khuddhanukhuddaka vinaya* rules, which gives us some idea about the *vinaya* rules that were set forth in the *ubhato vibhanga*. According to this text, each section of the *vinaya* has the following number of rules: 4 *pārājikas*, 13 *sanghadisesas*, 2 *aniyathas*, 30 *nissaggiya pācittiyas*, 92 *pācittiyas*, and 4 *patidesaniyas*.²

The total number of rules in each section is similar to those found in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* and the *pātimokka*. However, it is not mentioned that these *vinaya* rules applied only to *bhikkhus*. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether the number of rules in each section of the *pātimokka* was common to both the *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* (the *ubhato sangha*) at the time of the first Council or even whether the main rules of the *vinaya* were common to both. It is clear, however, that the numerical and conceptual differences that eventually appeared can be traced to the period when the texts were finalized.

In the Pāli canon, detailed explanations of the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas* can be found in the *vibhanga* section of the *vinaya pitaka*. In the *bhikkhu pātimokka* and the *bhikkhu vibhanga*, there are 220 *vinaya* rules and seven *adhikarana samathas*. In the *bhikkhunī pātimokka*, there are 304 *vinaya* rules and seven *adhikarana samathas*. With the exception of one *pācittiya* rule and one *sekiya* rule, the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* has 132 *vinaya* rules that apply only to *bhikkhunīs*. But the numerical difference between the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī pātimokkas* is only 84 *vinaya* rules. This means that in the *ubhato pātimokka*, 176 rules are applicable to only one party (i.e., either *bhikkhus* or *bhikkhunīs*).

According to the *Bhikkhunīkhandhaka* in the Pāli Cullavagga, three types of rules appear in the *bhikkhunī vinaya*:

1. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus*, but common to *bhikkhunīs*;
2. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhunīs*, but common to *bhikkhus*; and

3. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus* that are not common to *bhikkhunīs*.³

A study the *bhikkhu pātimokka* reveals that the *vinaya* rules for *bhikkhus* can be divided in the classification as follows:

1. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus* but common to *bhikkhunīs*;
2. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhunīs* but common to *bhikkhus*; and
3. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus* that are not common to *bhikkhunīs*.

As a result, four categories of *vinaya* rules can be identified in the *ubhato vinaya*:

1. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus* but common to *bhikkhunīs*;
2. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhunīs* but common to *bhikkhus*;
3. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhus* that are not common to *bhikkhunīs*; and
4. *vinaya* rules enacted for *bhikkhunīs* that are not common to *bhikkhus*.

Vinaya Rules in *Ubhato Pātimokka*

<i>Vinaya</i> Rule Category	No. of Rules Applicable to <i>Bhikkhus</i>	No. of Rules Applicable to <i>Bhikkhunīs</i>	Rules Applicable only to <i>Bhikkhus</i>	Rules Applicable only to <i>Bhikkhunīs</i>	No. of Rules in <i>Bhikkhunī</i> Vibhanga	No. of Rules Applicable to <i>Ubhato Sangha</i>
Pārājika	4	8	-	4	4	4
Sanghādisesa	13	17	6	10	10	7
Aniyatha	2	-	2	-	-	-
Nissaggiya Pācittiya	30	30	12	12	12	18
Pācittiya	92	166	21	95	96	71
Pātiesaniya	4	8	4	8	8	-
Sekhiya	75	75	1	1	2	74
Adhikarana-Samatha	7	7	-	-	-	7
Total	227	311	46	130	132	181

Rules Based on Physical Differences of Gender

Among the categories of *vinaya* rules that apply to only one party, some rules apply to only one gender. Some of the rules that pertain to one gender are related to physical differences and some rules reflect social attitudes regarding gender at the time. In the *bhikkhunī pātimokka*, some examples of *vinaya* rules based on physical differences of gender include the 22nd *pācittiya* on bathing cloths, the 47th *pācittiya* on menstrual cloths, and the 96th *pācittiya* on entering a village without wearing the vest (*sankaccika*). These rules apply only to nuns.

Among the rules in this category, some that apply to only one gender pertain to similar

offences, but are in different categories. For instance, the first *sanghadisesa* for *bhikkhus* applies only to males: “Intentional emission of semen, except while dreaming, entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community.”⁴ In the same manner, the third and fourth *pācittiyas* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* apply only to nuns. The third *pācittiya* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* states: “(Genital) slapping (even to the extent of consenting to a blow with a lotus-leaf) is to be confessed.”⁵ The fourth *pācittiya* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* states: “(The insertion of) a dildo is to be confessed.”⁶ All three rules involve autoerotism. When such an offence was committed by a *bhikkhu*, it was treated more seriously (as a *sanghadisesa* offence) than when it was committed by a *bhikkhunī* (only as a *pācittiya*). The reason for this difference is not clear.

The Buddhist attitude toward discipline is somewhat different than that of other religious and legal systems. The consequences of an offence are often determined based on the mental involvement of the person. The background on the first *pārājika* in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* explains this very clearly. According to this text, some young *Lecchavis* forced *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* to have sex. In one incident, the *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* became mentally involved in the action, whereas in another incident, the *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* was not mentally involved, and the Buddha declared that it was not an offence. Based on these incidences, we can conclude that the state of a person’s mind is an important factor in the Buddhist system of discipline and may be the main factor in determining the disciplinary consequences of the action.

There are also rules that consider social attitudes toward gender, but are based on physical differences. The 61st and 62nd *pācittiyas* in the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* are examples of this type. The 61st *pācittiya* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* states: “Should any *bhikkhunī* sponsor the acceptance (*upasampadā*) of a pregnant woman, it is to be confessed.”⁷ The 62nd *pācittiya* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka* states: “Should any *bhikkhunī* sponsor (the acceptance of) a woman who is still nursing, it is to be confessed.”⁸ These types of rules were enacted based on criticisms made by the public. From a practical point of view, it would be very difficult to look after a young child while practicing the discipline of a *bhikkhunī*, but the main factor in these cases seems to be social perceptions.

Rules Based on Social Attitudes toward Gender

At the time of Buddha, attitudes regarding clerics varied in society. Some people highly respected clerics, while some treated them very badly. There are incidences in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* where a *bhikkhu*’s robes were stolen by thieves, and the *bhikkhus* were forced to have sex with women. In the *bhikkhunī vibhanga*, there are incidences of *bhikkhunīs* being raped when they were alone, so it is clearly that there was a need to consider the safety of female monastics. Therefore, there are seven *vinaya* rules that prevent a *bhikkhunī* from being alone. One of them is the 3rd *sanghadisesa* of the *bhikkhunī vibhanga*, which prohibits *bhikkhunīs* from traveling alone:

Should any *bhikkhunī* go among villages alone or go to the other shore of a river alone or stay away for a night alone or fall behind her companion(s) alone: this *bhikkhunī*, also, as soon as she has fallen into the first act of offence, is to be (temporarily) driven out, and it entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community.⁹

There are also rules in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* that prevent *bhikkhunīs* from staying away

from the *bhikkhu sangha*. Some examples are *pācittiyas* 56 to 59 in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga*:

56. Should any *bhikkhunī* spend the rains retreat in a dwelling where there are no *bhikkhus* (nearby), it is to be confessed.

57. Should any *bhikkhunī*, having completed the rains retreat, not invite censure from both Communities with regard to three matters – what they have seen, heard, or suspected (her of doing) – it is to be confessed.

59. Every half-month, a *bhikkhunī* should request two things from the *bhikkhu* community: the date of the *uposatha* and the exhortation. In excess of that (each half-month), it is to be confessed.¹⁰

In addition, there are some *vinaya* rules in both the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī vibhanga*s that explain limitations on *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* relationships. All these rules were enacted in response to complaints from society at the time. The *bhikkhunōvadaka bagga*¹¹ in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* and *pācittiyas* 6, 51, 52, 94, and 95 in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* fall in this category.¹²

The *sangha* community is regarded as the ideal community of the Buddha's *sāsana* (dispensation). Therefore, it has a responsibility to maintain a positive image in mainstream society. As a result, behaviors that negatively affected social attitudes toward the *sangha* community were identified at an early stage (before the Buddha's *parinibbāna*). Altogether, 13 *antharaya-kāra dhammas* for *bhikkhus* and 24 *antharaya-kāra dhammas* for *bhikkhunīs* were noted during the *upasampadā*. In addition, 45 disqualifications are mentioned in the *Mahākkhandhaka* of the *Mahāvaggapali* and the *Bhikkhunīkhandhaka* of the *Cullavaggapali*, where the procedures for the *upasampadā* (higher ordination) are discussed. Of all the offences related to disqualifications for the *upasampadā*, only one *pācittiya* rule in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* and *pātimokka* is related to the suitable age for the *upasampadā*. But in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* and *pātimokka*, 12 rules are related to such disqualifications for the *upasampadā*. According to the *Mahākkhandhaka* of the *Mahāvaggapali*, if a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* ordains a person who has been sentenced to death by a recognized governing body, that person commits a *dukkata* offence. But according to the 2nd *sanghadisesa* of the *bhikkhunī pātimokka*, if a *bhikkhunī* ordains a person who has been sentenced to death by a recognized governing body, she commits a *sanghadisesa* offence. The 2nd *sanghadisesa* states:

Should any *bhikkhunī* knowingly give acceptance (*upasampadā*) to a woman thief who has been sentenced to death, without having obtained permission from the king or the Community or the (governing) council or the (governing) committee or the (governing) guild – unless the woman is allowed (i.e., already ordained in another sect or with other *bhikkhunīs*) – then this *bhikkhunī*, as soon as she has fallen into the first act of offence, is to be (temporarily) driven out, and the act entails initial and subsequent meetings of the Community.¹³

According to the background stories of both cases, the ordination of persons sentenced to death by a recognized governing body has a very bad effect on the reputation of the *sangha* community. It is not clear why this offence is categorized as a *sanghadisesa* offence for *bhikkhunīs* when it is not included in the *pātimokka* rules for *bhikkhus*.

For the majority of these rules, there is no clear justification why they do not apply to the other party. Some rules are also placed in different categories for *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*. For instance, the eight fine staple foods are discussed in the 39th *pācittiya* of the *bhikkhu vibhanga*:

There are these finer staple foods: ghee, fresh butter, oil, honey, sugar/molasses, fish, meat, milk, and curds. Should any *bhikkhu* who is not ill, having requested finer staple foods such as these for his own sake, then consume them, it is to be confessed.¹⁴

However, the same eight fine staple foods are itemized one by one in eight separate *patidesaniya* rules in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga*:

1. Should any *bhikkhunī*, not being ill, ask for ghee and consume it, she is to acknowledge it: “Lady, I have committed a blameworthy, unsuitable act that ought to be acknowledged. I acknowledge it.”

2-8. Should any *bhikkhunī*, not being ill, ask for oil... honey... sugar/molasses... fish... meat... milk... curds and consume it, she is to acknowledge it: “Lady, I have committed a blameworthy, unsuitable act that ought to be acknowledged. I acknowledge it.”¹⁵

In sum, if a *bhikkhu* who is not ill requests one of these fine foods, he commits a *pācittiya*, whereas a *bhikkhunī* who does so commits a *patidesaniya*. It is very difficult to understand the philosophical basis for treating *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* differently regarding the same offence.

One part of two *vinaya* rules in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* only applies to *bhikkhunīs*. According to the 35th *pācittiya* rule of the *bhikkhu vibhanga*, after having eaten and having turned down an offer of further food, a *bhikkhu* should not eat chew or consume staple or non-staple food that is not leftover. The 35th *pācittiya* for *bhikkhus* states:

Should any *bhikkhu*, having eaten and turned down an offer (of further food), chew or consume staple or non-staple food that is not leftover, it is to be confessed.

According to the 54th *pācittiya* rule in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga*, however, the *bhikkhunīs* cannot even eat the leftovers:

Should any *bhikkhunī*, having eaten and turned down an offer (of further food), chew or consume staple or non-staple food (elsewhere), it is to be confessed.

In the same manner, the 75th *sekhiyā* of the *bhikkhunī pāthmokka*¹⁶ includes the latter part of the 75th *sekhiyā* of the *bhikkhu pāthmokka*.¹⁷

Overall, among the rules that are applicable to one party, 26 *vinaya* rules in the *bhikkhu vibhanga* and 83 *vinaya* rules in the *bhikkhunī vibhanga* can apply to the *ubato sangha*. The reasons why these *vinaya* rules were not identified as common practices by the *sangha* members who finalized and edited the *vinaya* is unclear.

Conclusion

It is clear that the numerical differences between the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī patimokkas* mainly occurred during the process of classifying, finalizing, and editing that took place during the first three centuries after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*. It is also clear that there is no adequate philosophical justification for the majority of these differences.

For the person who practices good discipline and self-restraint, all the *vinaya* rules are more or less impotent, irrespective of the category to which they belong. Categorizing the *vinaya* rules according to the gravity of the offence that has been committed is effectual only for those who break the rules. The purpose of enacting the *vinaya* rules is to help the practitioner to attain *nibbāna*, not to construct a disciplinary code. The reasons behind the differences noted here may be that the *sangha* members who finalized and edited the codes only considered the incidences that caused the *vinaya* rules to be enacted.

NOTES

¹ Chullavagga Pāli II, pp. 550-51.

² Ibid., pp. 552-53.

³ Chullavagga Pāli II, Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Grantamala 2 (I, II), Sri Lanka: Tripitaka Sampadaka Mandalaya, Sri Lanka, 1979-83), pp. 480-81.

⁴ Parajikā Pāli, Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Grantamala 1 (Sri Lanka, Tripitaka Sampadaka Mandalaya, 1959).

⁵ Pācittiya Pali II, Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Grantamala 2 (I, II) (Sri Lanka: Tripitaka Sampadaka Mandalaya, 1981-95).

⁶ Ibid., pp. 140-41.

⁷ Pācittiya Pali II, p. 282-83.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 284-85.

⁹ Pācittiya pali II, p. 40-49.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 270-73, 276-79.

¹¹ Pācittiya pali I, pp. 145-99.

¹² Pācittiya pali II, pp. 144-47, 256-63, 364-67.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 34-41.

¹⁴ Pācittiya pali I, pp. 244-49.

¹⁵ Pācittiya pali II, pp. 372–79.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 380–81.

¹⁷ Pācittiya pali I, p. 532–55.

***Bhikkhunī* Ordination in India: Benefits and Barriers**

Bhikkhuni Suniti

In discussing *bhikkhunī* ordination, it is said that the entry of women to the *sangha* was not accepted by the Tathāgata Buddha when Mahāpajāpatī, his foster mother, initially requested it. Entry was given on the condition that she accept the eight special rules (*garudhammas*). However, other women were ordained as *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*, as advised by the Buddha. Nowhere does the Vinaya Pitaka mention that the *bhikkhus* should ask the *bhikkhunī* candidates to accept the eight special rules given to Mahāpajāpatī by the Tathāgata. Reports that this is mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka have had an adverse effect on the existence of the *bhikkhunī sangha* up to the present day, even though the requirement is not accepted as factual by learned *bhikkhunīs*. Due to this misconception, today the *bhikkhunī sanghas* in India and other Buddhist countries are struggling for their very existence.

In the history of India after the Buddha, the *bhikkhunī* order started spreading its branches up to the 20th century. In India, the *bhikkhunī* lineage was restored at the International Full Ordination Ceremony that was held in Bodhgaya in February 1998. At that ordination ceremony, *bhikkhunīs* from 23 different countries benefitted. About 30 Indian *sāmanerīs* (novice nuns, all from Maharashtra) were ordained as *bhikkhunīs*. The fact that Indian *bhikkhunīs* got the opportunity to receive the higher ordination after a long struggle was a great breakthrough. Prior to that time, many Indian women thought that they would never get the chance to be ordained as *bhikkhunīs*, because the circumstances were not favorable. At the same time, outside of India the *bhikkhunī* lineage was spreading from one country to another. Just as the lineage had been transmitted in earlier centuries from India to Sri Lanka and from Sri Lanka to China, *bhikkhunī* ordinations are also being held and accepted in many countries in the 21st century. But it was presumed that this could never happen in India, because Indian *bhikkhus* who hold gender-biased attitudes did not want *sāmanerīs* to be get equal opportunities to be fully ordained as *bhikkhunīs*. The *sāmanerīs* were also not sure to whom they should turn with their request for full ordination.

The *sāmanerīs* of India learned about the historical full ordination for *bhikkhunīs* in Bodhgaya rather late. They heard the news from Bhikkhu Sangharakṣita, when he went to Bodhgaya to attend the *kathina* ceremony.¹ Even though the deadline for accepting applications had passed, he requested that the Indian *bhikkhunīs* get a chance to register. It is thanks to him that the *bhikkhunī* lineage was revived in India after a gap of almost 1,500 years. It is sad to mention that, until then, no Indian *bhikkhunīs* had been registered for the ordination and the opportunity to benefit from it had almost slipped away from them, even though the ordination was held in their own country. At last, fortunately, 30 Indian nuns became fully ordained as *bhikkhunīs* in 1998 and the second pillar of the Buddha's fourfold community was restored in the country of its birth. Unfortunately, there was a hue and cry when these fully ordained *bhikkhunīs* returned to their home state of Maharashtra. There the *bhikkhunīs* had to face many unwanted situations. For example, some *bhikkhus* declared in the local newspapers that the nuns were not *bhikkhunīs* and could not be accepted as *bhikkhunīs* because Buddha did not want women in the *sangha*. This paper will present more details related to these historical events.

Due to the discriminatory attitude of the *bhikkhu sangha*, no *sāmanerī* spoke about or even thought about higher ordination for almost ten years after the Bodhgaya ordination. Later, with the support of a few *bhikkhus*, some young *sāmanerīs* went to Sri Lanka for training and were ordained

as *bhikkhunīs*. With the help of *bhikkhunīs* from Sri Lanka and Taiwan, the Indian *bhikkhunīs* who had been ordained in Sri Lanka organized a higher ordination ceremony on January 15, 2009, in Nagpur, Maharashtra. A second one was held on February 9, 2009, in Bodhgaya. Altogether 15 *bhikkhunīs* were ordained in Nagpur and 18 *bhikkhunīs* were ordained in Bodhgaya. But for these ordinations the Indian *bhikkhunīs* again had to look to the *bhikkhunīs* of other countries, which was an expensive effort.

Thanks to Sakyadhita International, 15 Indian *bhikkhunīs* got the opportunity to attend the 12th Sakyadhita Conference in Thailand and were able to witness the development and progress of the *bhikkhunīs* and the *bhikkhunī sangha* worldwide. It was an eye-opening visit. *Bhikkhunīs* from Sri Lanka and Taiwan became interested in bringing Indian *bhikkhunīs* into the mainstream at the international level and offered to organize a month-long training program in Maharashtra, India. This opportunity to become united with *bhikkhunīs* from other Buddhist countries was the first step toward the advancement of the Indian *bhikkhunī sangha*. This first attempt to learn about the Dhamma work of nuns from other countries through a training program with the *bhikkhunīs* of Sri Lanka and Taiwan failed, due to a lack of communications and many other reasons.

After evaluating the reasons for the failure of our first attempt, we again planned to attend the 13th Sakyadhita conference in Vaishali, India, with *bhikkhunīs* from Thailand, Vietnam, and Sri Lanka. After returning from these conferences, the Indian *bhikkhunīs* began to mobilize to form a formal *bhikkhunī sangha* with aims and objectives, rules and regulations, and to take on the responsibilities necessary to form a *bhikkhunī* organization. Thus, on the full moon day of June 2013, the All India Bhikkhuni Sangha was formed. The All India Bhikkhuni Sangha then organized a Dhamma training program in Nagpur to be held in November 2013, with the support of Bhikkhuni Dhammananda of Thailand, Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap of Vietnam, and Bhikkhuni Vijithananda of Srilanka. A group of nearly 25 Indian *bhikkhunīs* and *sāmanerīs* stayed together at Buddhabhoomi Khairi in Nagpur, Maharashtra, for 28 days and experienced the practical benefits of living together as a *sangha*. This time we did not want to lose the opportunity to organize a higher ordination ceremony and receive ordination from the Indian *bhikkhunī therīs* who had been ordained in Bodhgaya in 1998.

This higher ordination ceremony, which was organized on November 25, 2013, was a great success. It was an important historical event for the Indian *bhikkhunī therīs* to successfully take the roles of *uppajjaya* (preceptors). This ceremony boosted the confidence of Indian *bhikkhunīs*. It also confirmed that the four pillars of the *sāsana* (dissemination) that were introduced by the Buddha 2500 years ago had indeed taken root again in India. We are grateful to those venerable *bhikkhus* who were present at the ordination ceremony and served as witnesses, despite the threat declared by the All India Bhikkhu Sangha that they would be forced to disrobe.

The Benefits of Ordination

To become ordained is to enter into a new phase of life with a commitment to give full justice to one's motivation. The Buddha, the unique teacher in this world, gave women an opportunity to live happily and freely as human beings and fulfill the purpose of a sentient being. The *bhikkhunī* ordination thus opened the doors of their houses and allowed women to live the homeless life of an ascetic. To live independently, without the support of relatives, gives women the courage they need

to reap the benefits of practicing the Dhamma in a *sangha* of companions who all have the same motivation of attaining *nibbāna*. To have this opportunity strengthens the power of the decision one makes. It is an important decision to cut off one's long, beautiful hair and shave one's head. One removes all the ornaments and other things that are believed to be the signs of attractiveness. One enters a new arena of development where spiritual progress is welcomed, beyond cooking and taking care of family members.

The saying (though often only words) that mothers are the first teachers of their children was proven to be true when the Buddha allowed women to become *bhikkhunīs* and teachers of Dhamma, becoming not only mothers of their own children, but mothers of society. The compassion and motherly qualities inherent in women bloom and they shower these qualities on other living beings. As *bhikkhunīs*, they are welcomed by laypeople to give Dhamma talks. Previously, Dhamma education was only a dream for women. Now *bhikkhunīs* not only learn and practice Dhamma, but also become Dhamma teachers and skilled speakers, able to attain *nibbāna*. The secondary status of women and the stigma of being a woman are automatically eliminated as soon as a woman enters the *sangha*. The journey of gaining Dhamma knowledge, spreading wisdom, and living a life of compassion (*karuna*) and loving kindness (*metta*) begins with the formation of the *bhikkhunī sangha*.

Barriers and Obstacles

One obstacle for Indian *bhikkhunīs* is the Eight Special Rules (*garudhamma*), which were accepted by the first *bhikkhunī* of India, Mahāpajāpatī alone and not by other *bhikkhunīs*.² These rules are considered a barrier to the establishment of the *bhikkhunī sangha*. Another barrier is the purported statement of the Buddha that accepting women into the *sangha* would shorten the lifespan of the *sāsana* to just 500 years. This statement can be given more importance, because it shows that the Buddha was adamant about giving women entry to the *sangha*.

Both the Eight Special Rules and the purported prophecy are contrary to the principles of the Buddha's teachings. It is well known worldwide that equality is the foundation of his teachings, which applies to issues of caste, race, religion, and gender. It seems that some members of the *bhikkhu sangha* hold derogatory attitudes toward women and are afraid of losing their power over women. These attitudes contradict the principles that the Buddha taught, however, and are disreputable. These *bhikkhus* seem to fear that the respect and reverence they get from the Buddhist laypersons would have to be shared with the *bhikkhunīs*. They may also fear that they will be compared to the *bhikkhunīs*. Their attitudes are comparable to those of *brahmins* who want to rule over society, including women. They seem to assume that their words should be followed by others as commands, like those of a supreme being.

This situation of male dominance of the *sangha*, derogatory attitudes toward women, and fears of losing power to the *bhikkhunīs* still exists among some *bhikkhus* in Buddhist countries, such as Burma and Thailand, to an even greater extent than in India. In Burma, the government even jailed a *bhikkhunī* for wearing the saffron robe and using the title "*bhikkhunī*." The government will not even allow a *bhikkhunī* to use a photograph of herself in saffron robes for her passport. These measures are reputedly carried out by the government at the behest of the *bhikkhu sangha*. The *bhikkhu sangha* establishment does not seem to realize that such actions are inappropriate and incompatible with the Buddha's teachings, which are still alive and will hopefully remain alive. One

who understands the Buddha's teachings will emphatically say of discriminatory passages in the canon: "These words were not uttered by Buddha." One who understands the liberating message of the Buddha will recognize that discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, race, and religion is contradictory to the Buddha's teachings. Those who perpetuate such discrimination clearly show that they do not understand the Buddha's liberating message. Perhaps they do not want to understand.

The Buddha himself said "*Bhikkhus*, I allow you to ordain *bhikkhunīs*." This statement is mentioned in the Vinaya Pitaka and is placed after the passage where the Buddha give the eight special rules to Mahāpajāpatī, but it is neglected by the *bhikkhus*. During the lifetime of the Buddha, the *bhikkhus* accepted the Buddha's advice and ordained *bhikkhunīs*, as they had no valid reason to oppose his instructions. But soon after the *mahāparinibbāna* ("final liberation," or passing away) of the Tathāgata, during in the first council that was held, some *bhikkhus* (especially Bhikkhu Mahakassapa) took the opportunity to blame Bhikkhu Ananda for supporting the admission of women in the *sangha*.

There were many incidences where the *bhikkhunīs* and laywomen were given importance and some *bhikkhus* were apparently unable to control their jealousy. The question thus arises: Were these *bhikkhus* really *arahats*? *Bhikkhus* who are *arahats* are supposed to be without defilements such as jealousy, anger, desire, and attachment. Instead, they should be full of compassion, loving kindness, and equanimity. The *bhikkhus* who oppose the *bhikkhunī* ordination need to look into their hearts and examine whether they harbor ill will or hatred against women. Could it be that they desire to achieve the benefits of attaining *nibbāna* for themselves alone? Might it be possible that they want to retain power and do not want to share these benefits with *bhikkhunīs*? To do so would be to ignore Buddhist history and the existence of great nuns such as the *bhikkhunī therī* Sanghamitra, the daughter of the great King Asoka. Perhaps opponents of *bhikkhunī* ordination today are unaware that this remarkable nun transmitted the *bhikkhunī* lineage to Sri Lanka by ordaining Queen Anula and her entourage as *bhikkhunīs*. Perhaps they want to ignore the fact that the *bhikkhunī sangha* was active throughout India and Sri Lanka for more than 1000 years after the *mahāparinibbāna* of Buddha.

One important obstacle, which is the foundation of all these problems, is the custom of having women fully dependent on men, which is still prevalent in many countries. In Hindu society, men had the authority to control women in all respects. The father had control over his daughter, when she grew older he handed her over to another man as her husband, that man controlled her until she became old, and after that her son took control of her until the end of her life. This custom of controlling women has been practiced by men for centuries. And now, suddenly women are beginning to quietly move beyond their control by joining the *bhikkhunī sangha*. Even though *bhikkhus* are wearing robes, they seem unable to forget that they are still men and *bhikkhunīs* are women. And many men seem to have difficulty digesting the new reality of woman receiving equal treatment to men, even though both are in robes. Of course, there are exceptions, but large numbers of *bhikkhus* even today still oppose the admission of women to the *sangha*. I would like to apologize to the many respected members of the *bhikkhu sangha* who are compassionate and shower loving kindness on the *bhikkhunīs*, helping and supporting them whenever they are in need.

Finally, let us make a pledge that all *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* who teach or organize training programs for *sāmaneras* or *sāmanerīs* should teach everyone to respect all human beings, whether

they are *bhikkhus* or *bhikkhunīs*, laymen or laywoman, boys or girls, because this is a cardinal principle of the Tathāgata Buddha’s teachings.

NOTES

¹ The *kathina* celebration is an opportunity for the lay community to offer robes and other requisites to the *sangha* at the end of the rainy season retreat (*vassa*), which traditionally lasts for three months.

² T. Dhammaloka Annunayka Thera (Sri Lanka), “The Establishment of the Nuns Order,” *Commemorative Magazine of the International Full Ordination Ceremony* (Bodhgaya, 1998).

Controversies and Prospects: Issues Surrounding the Establishment of the Female Monastic Sangha in Bangladesh

B. D. Dipananda

After a long gap in the lineage of the Theravada *bhikkhunī* tradition, in 1998 the order was re-established with the encouragement of Sakyadhita International Association of Women, under the auspices of Foguangshan at Bodhgaya, India.¹ Since then, many women have been ordained in Sri Lanka and other countries. Motivated by this renewed ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, some Bengali women were inspired to receive novice ordination.² Seven of them went to Bodhgaya, India, and received ordination from Bhikkhu Varasambodhi Thera, on November 5, 2011.³ In the end, three out of seven aspired to continue being nuns. When they returned to Bangladesh, Samaneri Gautami, formerly known as Runa Barua, went to Deputy Sangharaja Bhikkhu Jnanasri Mahathera to pay respects.⁴

When Samaneri Gautami returned to Chittagong, Bhikkhu Aryasri, the director of Chandgaon Vipassana Meditation Center, and many other devotees received her by showering flowers and sweets on her. She then approached Sangharaja Dharmasena Mahathera, the supreme patriarch of the council, who blessed her and said, “For whatever purpose you have received ordination, may it be successful.” She was also invited to deliver a Dhamma talk at a village called Pahartali by Bhikkhu Prajna Bangsha, a prominent monk in Bangladesh. At that talk, he introduced her as a female monastic in the following manner: “At one time, the *bhikkhunī sangha* existed, but due to various reasons, it became extinct and those nuns who remained practiced as *sadhu-ma* (female renunciants). Today, too, [the *bhikkhunī sangha*] is extinct. In the meantime, the *vipassana* teacher Runa Barua has come to us as a novice nun. Now, she will express her feelings and experience to the audience.” Since that time, having transcended the existing limitations for nuns, Samaneri Gautami has been invited to various temples and villages to deliver Dhamma talks.⁵

Sanctions and Denunciations

On January 27-28, 2013, the *samaneri* community in Bangladesh organized an anniversary celebration. On that occasion, twenty women were keen to become temporary novices. They invited around fifty monks to the event. They released a statement that said, “In conferring ordination to women 2,500 years ago, the Buddha recognized women’s capability in spiritual practice and opposed the gender discrimination that existed in society during the Buddha’s time. Today, in the countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and many other countries, the *bhikkhunī sangha* and *samaneri* community are increasingly visible. With the establishment of these communities, women are contributing to the propagation of Dhamma. Similarly, in Bangladesh the *vipassana* teacher Samaneri Gautami, together with some other women, received novice ordination, which is a glorious new chapter in the history of Bangladesh Buddhism.”⁶

However, the situation took a dramatic turn on January 19, 2013. The Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh called a meeting and decided not to participate in the ordination events and rejected the ordination of women as illegal. A statement released by the Council quoted the traditional reason for barring women from becoming nuns:

After conferring ordination on women, the Buddha predicted that his dispensation (*sāsana*) will last only five thousand years, which could have been ten thousand, as specified in the Vinaya. After the Buddha's *mahāparinibbā*, the *arahant* monks banned the ordination of women during the Buddhist Council.⁷ [exactly which council is not mentioned]. It was also mentioned that it is a sin for women to touch the robes and therefore they cannot wear the robes.⁸

In light of the latest findings of recent scholars, the claims made by the Supreme Sangha Council in relation to bhikkhunis are subject to question, and the recent historical facts also point against their allegations.

Despite these statement, the nuns continued the celebration with the help of some monks and devotees. After the program, the Council hosted a meeting at Devpahar International Buddhist Monastery in Chittagong on February 3, 2014, and sent five monks to the *samaneris*' residence to demand that the *samaneris* give up their robes within seven days. They also passed a *brahmadanda*, a monastic rite of social exclusion, on Bhikkhu Varasambodhi for giving *samaneri* ordination to women.⁹ The monks who rejected the ordination of women openly preached that devotees must not allow their daughters to be ordained. Despite the sanctions and denunciations, the *samaneri* community has survived and is struggling for recognition.¹⁰

Existence of the Female Monastics in Bengal

There is evidence to confirm that Buddhism existed during the early period of Buddhist history in the area that today is known as Bengal. In the *Therigāthā*, Therī Sumedha, who was a prominent poet at that time, is mentioned as a daughter of Bengal.¹¹ King Ashoka's daughter Bhikkhunī Sanghamitra, who journeyed to Sri Lanka with a sapling of the *bodhi* tree in the third century BCE, is said to have traveled through Tamluk, Bengal.¹² Peter Skilling has written that "the word *bhiksuni* seems to vanish from the epigraphic vocabulary with the Pāla period,"¹³ suggesting that *bhikkhunīs* existed before the Pala period. According to Bhikkhu Anaalayo, "Inscriptional evidence indicates that *bhikkhunī* existed in India even in the 8th century."¹⁴ This is further confirmed by Huntington, who suggests that even in the 10th century donations by *bhikkhunis* were still existent: "The inscription on a tenth-century image of Tārā from Kurkiha, Bihar, now in the Indian Museum, Kolkata (I.M. 5862/A25133), clearly identifies the donor as '*bhiksuni Gunamātā*' (nun Gunamātā). The complete donor inscription reads, '*deya dharmoyam śākyabhiksuni guramāteh*.'"¹⁵ Moreover, based on a donation mentioned in a later manuscript, Jinah Kim asserts that the *bhikkhuni sangha* still existed in India in the 12th century. She states that, "The twelfth-century donation referred to above is a complete manuscript of the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses;...) now in the Detroit Institute of Art. Dated to the seventeenth regnal year of the Pāla king Madanapāla (c. 1160 CE), it was prepared by a scribe (*lekhaka*) named Śrīdharaka in the town of Ghosālīgrama. The donor of the manuscript was a nun (*bhiksuni*) named Mahāśrībhadrā, who is identified as a disciple (*śisyā*) of a śākya elder (śākyastharā, *sic.*), Vijayaśrībhadrā."¹⁶ Another scholar, Bhikkhu Prajna Bangsha, a Bangladeshi monk, is also attempting to prove the existence of a female monastic order in Bengal, referring for instance to "Bhikkhuni Bhava Bhuti, the sister of the King Urisa (9th century A.D.), who was famous for her

supernatural powers.” He is also attempting to show that the *bhikkhuni sangha* continued to exist on Bengali soil up until the 12th century.”¹⁷ Although the inscriptional evidence is not complete, considering all the above evidence and due to Bengal’s geographical proximity to Orissa, Bihar and Bengal and the presence of regal donations during the Pala Dynasty, I conclude that there is a very high possibility that the *bhikkhuni sangha* existed in the area of Bengal from the time of the Buddha until the 12th century.

During the period when Bengal was ruled by Islamic sultans, from the 12th to 16th centuries, Buddhism was barely visible in the region. Under British colonial rule, prominent monks such as Bhikkhu Samedha revived the practice of Buddhism and many lay social activists and women in Bengal began to practice religious celibacy.¹⁸ Celibate women practitioners were known as *sadhu-mas*.¹⁹ A decade ago, one could still meet *sadhu-mas*, but few such practitioners exist today, due to a lack of support for women’s renunciant practice.

The Presence of Nuns in Bangladesh

After Bangladesh became independent in 1971, Buddhism started to thrive in the country and many women were enthusiastic about the practice of religious life. Some monks gave them support to do so. Bhikkhu U Paññajota Thera, a prominent monk who has a close connection with the *bhikkhu sangha* in Myanmar, introduced a system of eight-precept ordination for nuns that follows the Burmese tradition and is extant today. From then on, many other monks, Bhikkhu Smritimitra and Bhikkhu Praggabodhi among them, followed this tradition. However, this ordination system is not widely accepted in Bangladesh, due to a lack of recognition from the *bhikkhu sangha* and concerns about security for nuns living in a country that is predominantly Muslim. Gradually, some female Buddhist practitioners have become adept at *vipassana* meditation, expert in teaching Dhamma, and were called Arya Mata (Noble Mother). Samaneri Gautami is one of them.²⁰ Out of deep faith in the Dhamma, she decided to receive ordination as a *samaneri* on November 5, 2011. Other female practitioners are also interested in receiving ordination, but due to the present circumstances, for instance, lack of recognition and support from the *sangha* and lay devotees, they continue to live a celibate lifestyle without becoming ordained. A woman named Chaya Rani Barua from West Bengal, India, had a sincere desire to become ordained and is presently known as Bhikkhuni Ruhong. Bhikkhu Sangharakkhita, a Bangladeshi monk presently living in Hyderabad, India, took her to Foguanshan Monastery in Taiwan, where she received novice ordination in the Mahayana tradition on September 27, 1996. This ordination caused a major controversy, both in the monastic and lay communities of Bengal. Nevertheless, this nun observes the *bhikkhuni* precepts and is currently studying at the University of Calcutta in India.

Dilemmas Faced by Contemporary Female Monastics

When Runa Barua became ordained as Samaneri Gautami, the issue was highly controversial within the Bangladesh Sangha. The Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Sangaraj Bhikkhu Mahasabha) ordered her to disrobe and become a *mae chee* in the Thai tradition or a *thila shin* in the Burmese tradition, but she refused. Though disputes concerning the ordination were widespread, Bhikkhus Praggabodhi and Aryasri have continued to conduct novice ordinations for

women.²¹ Today, there are altogether ten nuns in Bangladesh who have been ordained as *samaneris*. Following the Supreme Sangha Council's order prohibiting the ordination of women, no monks except Bhikkhus Praggabodhi and Aryasri have performed ordinations for women.

On the occasion of Vesak Day in 2014, held on May 13 in Bangladesh, Bhikkhu Asin Jinarakkhita, the abbot of Bodhiyana Meditation Centre in Dhaka, initiated a new type of religious lifestyle for a woman. This did not involve a traditional nun's robe, but a type of gown made of red cloth resembling a *civara*. Another *sangha* council, known as the Bangladesh Bauddha Bhikkhu Mahasabha, neither accepts nor rejects the ordination of women. Discussions with some monks of this council indicate they are not hostile to such ordinations. Although they are not opposed to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order, thus far no monks from that council have conducted ordinations for women.

Rhetoric Opposed to the Establishment of the *Bhikkhunī* Order in Bangladesh

An urgent notice of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh, issued in January 2013 in Chittagong, mentions, "After conferring ordination to five hundred Sakya women, including Mahapajapati and Rahul's mother Yasodhara, the Buddha is said to have predicted that, due to women's admission to the order, the Buddha's dispensation would not last long. Today in many Theravada Buddhist countries, such as Myanmar and Thailand, women may live as nuns, but cannot wear the traditional robes of a nun. In Thailand, most nuns wear white clothes. On Vesak Day in 2011, a Thai nun requested that the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand allow women to go forth into homelessness, but the council immediately rejected her application, saying, 'Our elder monks previously never allowed women to touch the robes; therefore, we also cannot allow women to ordain either as a *samaneri* or *bhikkhunī*.'"²²

In discussions, some monks who are opposed to the establishment of a *bhikkhunī* order in Bangladesh say that they and their council, the Bangladesh Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha, will never give permission for women to ordain. Bhikkhu S. Lokajit, a member of the council, says, "All members of the council decided not to allow any women to ordain and I personally will not encourage any women to go forth. But if they follow the Myanmar or Thai nuns' tradition, our council will support them." Another influential monk, Bhikkhu Kusalayan, founder of the Jnasen Bhikkhu and Samanera Training Center in Ukiya, Cox's Bazar, says "Today many Buddhist women in Bangladesh are oppressed. They are ready to practice the spiritual life, but they do not have a place or support. Instead of becoming a fully ordained nun, they can follow the Myanmar tradition." However, in discussions about the issue, many monks they say, "In other Theravada Buddhist countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar, the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī sangha* has not yet been accepted or recognized. Under the circumstances, our small group of Bangladeshi Buddhists cannot take a decision."

Reflections on Social Acceptance

Although the majority of Bangladesh Buddhists in the lay community accept the ordination of women, due to sanctions by the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh, they are trapped in a dilemma. As Shimul Barua puts it,

As part of humanity, everyone has the right to choose their religious life. Women are also a part of our society and I strongly support the religious right that the Buddha conferred on them. But like Bangladesh where mostly minorities are always in danger, and in concern of these social problems female monastics should also follow some social rules and regulation for their safety and security.²³

In discussions with Samaneri Gautami, she stated that some non-sectarian women's organizations support female monastics, not on the grounds of religion but on the grounds of gender equality and women's rights. Many non-Buddhist groups also support her. When the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh imposed sanctions on her, including a request that she disrobe and a plea to the public not to give her any support, Shantikunja Buddhist Temple, the host temple in Chittagong, was not allowed to host celebrations due to the order issued by the council, but a Muslim follower offered to lend a place abutting his house in Chittagong for the celebration of the first anniversary of the *samaneri sangha*. A Muslim woman also donated a set of eight requisites to a woman who was keen to take temporary novitiate vows during the anniversary celebration.²⁴

Prospects

At present, the Bangladesh Samaneri Sangha publishes an annual journal titled *Gautami*²⁵ to which many social activists and concerned groups contribute articles about women's rights and feminist issues. To inaugurate the journal, these groups hosted a small non-sectarian celebration attended by many people, including university professors and social activists. Besides, the nuns are invited to receive alms and to give Dhamma talks in many Buddhists villages. Samaneri Gautami is also frequently invited to give meditation instruction.

One strong advocate of *bhikkhuni* ordination, an influential monk in Bangladesh named Bhikkhu Sadhanananda Mahathera (Bana Bhante), thought positively about the future of the female *sangha*, but cautiously alerted practitioners to the importance of textual studies of the *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha*, *Bhikkhuni Vibhanga*, and *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka*.²⁶ Due to his sincere wish, those texts have been translated into Bengali by Bhikkhu Prajna Bangsha Mahathero and Bhikkhu Satyapriya Mahathera.²⁷ Nevertheless, his aspiration has been thwarted due to the potentially disruptive effect the issue may have in Bangladeshi Buddhist society. Another Bangladeshi monk, Bhikkhu Rastrapal Mahathera²⁸ founder of the International Meditation Center in Bodhgaya, India, was also a leading member of the first *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony held in December 1996 at Sarnath, India.²⁹ Motivated by his contribution to reestablish the *bhikkhuni sangha*, Bhikkhu Varasambodhi Thera, secretary of the International Meditation Center in Bodhgaya, fulfilled his sincere wish by conferring *samaneri* ordination on women in Bodhgaya, thus taking the first step toward establishing the first female monastic *sangha* in Bangladesh.

As a sequel, it is hoped that the *bhikkhuni sangha* will be firmly established in Bangladesh. The recent ordination of five *samaneris* in the country, though still not officially recognized by the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha), is a positive step in the long fight for the endorsement of female monastic rights. As monks, nuns, and lay devotees in Bangladesh become better educated about Buddhism, it is likely that they will play a vital role in reestablishing the order of nuns. What is perhaps missing is a catalyst that can stimulate

cultural changes that will lead women to assuming greater roles of authority in religion and perhaps in other spheres of Bangladeshi society.

Conclusion

The Buddha strongly advocated the importance of respect and honor for women. He was instrumental in their social advancement and established a monastic order for women that was free of caste and class discrimination. The *bhikkhuni* elders were known for their knowledge, intelligence, discipline, and spiritual achievement, which are chronicled in the poetry collection titled *Therīgāthā*. The hardships faced by the *bhikkhuni sangha* were exacerbated by the fact that, after the *parinibbana* of the Buddha, the monk elders who were in control of the *bhikkhu sangha* imposed a number of harsh rules for nuns, for example, the eight weighty rules or conditions (*attaguru dhamma*), D. D. Kosambi asserts that the *bhikkhu sangha* formulated these eight rules in the Vinaya and the Anguttara Nikaya in order “to put all power in their own hands.”³⁰ These rules have caused many people to criticize Buddhism for being conservative on gender issues. In this regard, Professor Nalinaksha Dutt believes that the work of certain historians has led to the mistaken impression that the Buddha was very narrow-minded about women and feels confident that this misconception could be remedied by a thoughtful reading of the *Therīgāthā*.³¹ Due to unfortunate interpretations of Buddhist history, many *bhikkhus* in Bangladesh have inherited a condescending attitude towards female. They misconstrue textual evidence, which sadly reinforces such unexamined prejudices. This bias is evident in the notice issued by the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh.

Looking at the history of Buddhism in Bangladesh, we see that although Bengal was a majority Buddhist land in earlier centuries, at present Bangladesh has a large Muslim majority. From the 18th century onwards, after a period of decline, many monastics and lay followers have worked tirelessly to develop Buddhism in Bengal. A number of women were well known for their contributions. For example, in 1866 the Chakma queen Kalindi built a Buddhist temple, Sakyamuni Temple, with a large image of the Buddha at Rajanagar, the former capital of the Chakma rulers. She also took the initiative to publish Buddhist books in Bengali. In 1870, she invited Bhikkhu Samedha, the first Sangharaj of the present Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh and many other monks to build a *bhikkhu sima*, which was the first *bhikkhu sima* in the history of Bangladesh since the revival of Theravada Buddhism by the first *sangharaj*.³² In the 1970s the Bengali meditation master Dipa Ma became known worldwide for her teaching of meditation teaching and also contributed to the development of Buddhism in Bangladesh.³³

Motivated by the activities of these remarkable women, Samaneri Gautami practiced meditation since childhood and became the first nun to become ordained in Bangladesh in recent history. She established the Bangladesh Samaneri Sangha, which now has ten ordained nuns. Unfortunately, however, the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh refuses to accept these nuns’ ordinations as legitimate and has openly spoken against women’s ordination. Some young monks and many lay followers support the nuns, but their support is muted because of the ordination of nuns is rejected by elder monks of their order. Many Buddhists hope that the *samaneri sangha* will be established and develop into a *bhikkhuni sangha*, but the controversy continues and much work remains before the majority of Theravada Buddhists firmly support a *bhikkhuni sangha* in Bangladesh.

NOTES

¹ In 1996, an ordination of ten (or eleven according to Amarasiri Weeraratne, “Buddhism and Women: Revival of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka,” *The Island*, Colombo (Sri Lanka), April 4, 1998. Sri Lankan women took place at Sarnath, India, with the assistance of *bhikkhus* from Korea and from the Mahabodhi Society. In 1998, a grand ceremony was held at Bodhgaya, India, where nuns from Sri Lanka and from other countries received full ordination. Since then, many more women have received ordination in other countries. Bhikkhu Bodhi, “The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in the Theravada Tradition” (Penang, Inward Publication, 2009. p. 2.

² Five of these women were from Bangladesh and two were from Kolkata, India. Personal communication with Samaneri Gautami.

³ This ordination was carried out together with the presence of Bhikkhu Dikpala Mahathera, Bhikkhu Ratanasri Mahathera, Bhikkhu Kaccayana (a Ph.D. research student at the University of Delhi), and others.

⁴ The Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha) was established in 1864 after Bhikkhu Samedha, the first Sangharaja, came from Arakan to Chittagong and ordained monks with the purpose of purifying the *sangha* of prevalent superstitious practices. This council is now known as the Sangharaj Nikaya and the organization is named Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha. Those who did not receive ordination from Bhikkhu Samedha were known as *Mather Dali*, now known as the Mahasthavir Nikaya. Members of this *nikaya* also refer to their organization as the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh (Bangladesh Bauddha Bhikkhu Mahasabha). Apart from these two organizations, there are also other Sangha Councils in different ethnic groups.

⁵ Samaneri Gautami, “Constant Obstruction, Threats, and Humiliation of the Victim: Samaneri Gautami, Whose Life is Inspired by the Buddha’s Compassion.” Bangladesh: Dhammainfo (online), <http://dhammainfo.com/article/buddhism-insights/991> (accessed August 15, 2014). Translated from Bengali to English by the author.

⁶ Leaflet issued by Samaneri Gautami and Engineer Apurva Mitra Barua, president and secretary general, respectively, of the Celebration Committee of the First Anniversary of the Bangladesh Samaneri Sangha, 2013 (Chittagong: Samaneri Arama, 2013). Translated from Bengali to English by the author.

⁷ I wrote an article in Bengali about this issue, titled, “The Status of Women in Buddhism and Recent Circumstances in Bangladesh,” which argues that there was no Buddhist council that banned the ordination of women. But Bhikkhu U Pannya Siri says he has a copy of a book written in Burmese that documents the banning of *bhikkhuni* ordination and states that this ban was passed at the Sixth Sangha Council in Myanmar. Unfortunately, he did not respond to my request for more information about this book.

⁸ This urgent notice was issued by Bhikkhu Ajitananda Mahathera and Bhikkhu Shasanapriya Mahathera, president and secretary general, respectively, of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh. Translated from Bengali to English by the author.

⁹ Leaflet issued on February 14, 2013, by Bhikkhu Ajitananda Mahathera and Bhikkhu Shasanapriya Mahathera, president and secretary general, respectively, of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh, and distributed by Bhikkhu Jinaratan Thera, secretary of publications.

¹⁰ Samaneri Gautami, “Constant Obstructions,” op cit.

¹¹ Prof. Prajna Bangsha Bhikshu (Mahathero), “Key Issues Related to the Establishment of Restoration of Bhikkuni Lineage in Bangladesh Therabada Buddhist Tradition, Where It Doesn’t Currently Exist,” International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha Bhikshuni Vinaya and Ordination Linerages. <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/44.0.html> (accessed August 15, 2014).

¹² Ananda W. P. Guruge, “Sri Lanka’s Role in the Spread of Buddhism in the World.” A public lecture under the Auspices of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka presented on November 15, 2010. Tamluk is presently located in Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India.

¹³ Peter Skilling, “A Note on the History of the Bhikkhunī-sangha (II): The Order of Nuns after the Parinirvāna.” *The World Fellowship of Buddhists Review* 30:4 & 31:1(1993) 29-49. Quoted in Bhikkhu Analayo, “The Revival of the Bhikkhunī Order and the Decline of the Sāsana,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20(2013) 116.

¹⁴ Bhikkhu Analayo, “The Revival of the Bhikkhunī Order,” p. 116.

¹⁵ Susan L. Huntington, *The “Pāla-Sena” School of Sculpture* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), Figure 113. Cited by Jinah Kim in “Unheard Voices: Women's Roles in Medieval Buddhist Artistic Production and religious Practices in South Asia,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80:1(2012) 204.

¹⁶ Kim, “Unheard Voices, p. 207

¹⁷ Bhikkhu Prajna Bangsha, “Key Issues,” op cit.

¹⁸ Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh*, p. 35.

¹⁹ *Sadhu-mas* are usually older women who wear white clothes, observe eight precepts, and live a religious life. Some shave their heads, while others do not. Some stay in temple areas and some live at home.

²⁰ These include Ranu Prava Barua (1945–1999), a Buddhist master who began teaching meditation in 1989. She never married and lived in her brother's house in Chittagong. Another is Suru Bala Talukdar (1919–1997), a prominent female meditation master widely known as

Babuillar Ma (Babul's mother) who was married to Ruhini Ranjan Talukdar. Her teacher was Bhikkhu Sumanacara Mahathera, who established the first meditation center in Bangladesh at Jamijuri, Chittagong. A third is Sanju Barua, a meditation master currently living and teaching in Chandgoan, Chittagong. She was trained by Bodhipala Samanera, a prominent meditation master, and has been practicing meditation since she was 25. She remained single and is now 40 years old. These female meditation masters are generally addressed as Arya Mata, "noble mother."

²¹ On July 9, 2014, five women received novice ordination from Bhikkhu Praggabodhi and Bhikkhu Aryasri at the *samaneris'* residence: Samaneri Arama, Baizid, Chittagong.

²² This urgent notice was issued on January 19, 2013, by Bhikkhu Ajitananda Mahathera and Bhikkhu Shasanapriya Mahathera, president and secretary general, respectively, of the Supreme Sangha Council of Bangladesh. Translation from Bengali to English by the author.

²³ Based on personal conversation with Professor Shimul Barua, vice-president of the Anoma Cultural Association, a regional branch of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, in Chittagong, Bangladesh, on July 13, 2014.

²⁴ Samaneri Gautami, "Constant Obstructions," op cit.

²⁵ Four issues of this journal are in print, published in October 2011, September 2012, September 2013, and July 2014.

²⁶ Prajna Bangsha Bhikshu, "Key Issues," op cit.

²⁷ Prajna Bangsha Bhikshu (Mahathero), *Bhikkhuni Patimokkha* (Rangamati, Bangladesh: Ban Bhante Academy Press, 2005); *Bhikkhuni Vibhanga* (Rangamati, Bangladesh: Ban Bhante Academy Press, 2005); and Bhikkhu Satyapriya Mahathera, *Bhikkhuni Khandhaka* (Rangamati, Bangladesh: Ban Bhante Academy Press, 2005).

²⁸ Bhikkhu Dr. Rastrapal Mahathera was born on April 25, 1930, in Chittagong and passed away on December 22, 2008, at Bodhgaya. He was an international meditation teacher of repute and supreme patriarch (*sangharaja*) of the Supreme Sangha Council of India (Bharatiya Sangharaj Bhikkhu Mahasabha). He served two terms as a member for Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC).

²⁹ Hiroko Kawanami, "The Bhikkhuni Ordination Debate: Global Aspirations, Local Concerns," *Buddhist Studies Review* 24:2(2007) 227–44.

³⁰ D. D. Kosambi (trans. Chandroday Bhattacharya), *Bhagavan Buddha*, 3rd ed. (in Bengali). (Kolkata: Sahitya Academy, 2001), p. 111.

³¹ Bhikkhu Shilabhadra, trans., "Preface" (in Bengali), *Therīgāthā* (Calcutta: Mahabodhi Society, 1951).

³² Sukumal Chaudhuri, *Contemporary Buddhism in Bangladesh* (Calcutta: Atisha Memorial Publishing Society, 1982), p. 35.

³³ Amy Schmidt, *Dipa Ma: The Life and Legacy of a Buddhist Master* (New York: Bluebridge, 2005); B. D. Dipananda, “Dipa Ma: An Extraordinary Female Buddhist Master in the Twentieth Century,” Buddhistdoor International (online), May 14, 2014.

Bhikkhunī Ordination in Thailand, 2014

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh)

On November 29, 2014, eight Buddhist women were fully ordained at Thipayasathan Dhamma Bhikkhuni Arama in Koh Yoh, Songkhla, in the southern part of Thailand. This is the first time in Thai history that the ordination of a *bhikkhunī sangha* has been conducted in Thailand. The one *bhikkhunī* ordination held prior to this was an ordination of only one *bhikkhunī*, which was held in Payao in 2013. By contrast, the Koh Yoh ordination involved a full contingent of the Thai *bhikkhunī sangha*. In recounting this historical event, it is appropriate to record the entire ordination process.

In preparing to conduct a *bhikkhunī* ordination in Thailand, I was meticulous in preparing every possible detail of the procedures prescribed in the *vinaya*. The preparations for the ordination began at least two years before the ordination took place.

The Four Qualities of a Valid Ordination

Four qualities (*sampatti*) are needed for an ordination to be valid. If an ordination lacks any of these four qualities, it is *vipatti*, or invalid. The main focus of this paper is to examine these four qualities in the context of this particular ordination. The four qualities are: (1) the quality of the candidate (*vatthu sampatti*); (2) the quality of the *sangha* conducting the ordination (*purisa sampatti*), (3) the consecration of the place where the ordination takes place (*sīmā sampatti*); and (4) the recitation (*kammavaca sampatti*), which includes the request for ordination and the ordination itself:

1. *Vatthu sampatti* refers to the quality of the candidate. The candidate must be at least 20 years old and she must have completed two years of training as a *sikkhamāna* under the guidance of a *bhikkhunī* teacher. She needs to appropriately answer all the 24 *antarayikkadhamma* (questions regarding certain dangers or impediments to ordination). If the candidate lacks any of these qualities, then she is *vipatti* (lacking in the requirements) and the ordination is not valid.

In the case of the Koh Yoh ordination, the nine *sāmanerīs* who received *pabbajjā* had become *sāmanerīs* on January 15, 2012. In November 2012, they received the *sikkhamānā* ordination from a *bhikkhunī sangha* with me, Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, serving as the principal teacher (*acarya*). This was the first occasion that the *sikkhamānā* ordination was introduced to Thailand. Prior to this, nuns had received the *sāmanerī* ordination in Sri Lanka, but not the *sikkhamānā* ordination. When I returned to Thailand, certain Thai monks suggested that nuns should closely follow the procedures prescribed in the *vinaya*. Thus, we arranged for the nine *sāmanerīs* to receive the *sikkhamānā* ordination in preparation for becoming *bhikkhunīs*. One of the nuns disrobed and returned to South Africa.¹

2. *Purisa sampatti* refers to the quality of the *sangha* conducting the ordination. The *bhikkhu sangha* that conducts the *upasampadā* (ordination) must consist of, at minimum, five *bhikkhus*. The *upājjhaya* (the senior *bhikkhu* presiding at the ordination ceremony, the one

who gives ordination) must have at least ten years' standing as a *bhikkhu* and must be learned in both the Dhamma and the *vinaya*. In Thailand, a *bhikkhu upājjhaya* must be appointed by the Council of Elders.

At this ordination, the *upājjhaya* was Maha Nayaka Mahinda, the abbot of Dipaduttam Aramaya in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The two teachers, the *kammavacaraya* and the *anunsavanacarya*, were Bhikkhu Dr. Kalupahana and Bhikkhu Sudhamma from Sri Lanka. In addition, 13 monks from Thailand participated in the ordination. On the *bhikkhunī* side, Bhikkhuni Sumitra from Sri Lanka acted as the *pavattinī* (a senior *bhikkhunī* with at least 12 *vassas* who is responsible for training the candidate requesting full ordination).² Bhikkhuni Dr. Lieu Phap from Vietnam and Bhikkhuni Santini from Indonesia acted as the *kammavacarinī* (the *bhikkhunī* teacher who leads the recitation requesting ordination and asks certain questions) and the *anusavanacarinī* (the *bhikkhunī* teacher responsible for training the candidate to become a *bhikkhunī*),³ respectively, along with nine other *bhikkhunī*s. A total of 12 *bhikkhunī*s participated: two from Sri Lanka, one from Vietnam, one from Indonesia, and eight from Thailand. Both the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī sanghas* thus fulfilled the qualities prescribed in the *vinaya*.

3. *Sīmā sampatti* refers to the requirement of consecrating the place where the ordination takes place. Full ordination must be conducted within a consecrated boundary. To fulfill this requirement, Bhikkhuni Dhammadipa, the chief nun of Thipayasathandhamma Bhikkhuni Arama, invited the *bhikkhu sangha* to come to perform the *sīmā sammutti* (consecration of the place) prior to the actual ordination ceremony. At this ordination, the boundary was marked by large stone markers in all the four main directions and four minor directions. Thus the requirement was met.

4. *Kammavaca sampatti* refers to the requirement of recitation, including both the request for ordination and the actual ordination. Some more strict members of the Thai *sangha* insist that the name of the candidate and the name of the teacher be clearly pronounced, instead of simply saying “preceptor” (*tissa*) or “candidate” (*naginī*). This formal method of recitation in which individual names are pronounced was requested at this ordination. Bhikkhuni Lieu Phap and Bhikkhuni Santini, who were the *kammavacarinī* and *anusavanacarinī*, respectively, were focused on making this announcement of the names. The eight candidates had to repeat the *upasampadā* recitation four times; each time only two candidates received ordination.

Thus, at this ordination, all the four requirements were met. One can see that to prepare for full ordination, one needs to prepare the candidates for a minimum of two years' training as *sikkhamāna*, apart from other preparations.

Refuting the Notion of Dual Ordination

In my study, I have found that the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* is, in fact, conducted by the

bhikkhus. The procedure has been misunderstood and often labeled “dual ordination,” or ordination by both *sanghas*. Since there have never been any *bhikkhunīs* in Thailand, we could not initiate the *bhikkhunī* ordination.

If we go back to the time of the Buddha’s enlightenment, however, we recall that Mara came and requested the Buddha to pass away. The Buddha told Mara that he would not do so until a four-fold community of Buddhists – *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, *upāsakas*, and *upāsikās* – was well established. To be established means that the four groups of Buddhists rigorously study the Buddha’s teachings, put them into practice, and should be able to defend the teachings if they came under attack from outside. This is a very interesting incident, because we must note that *bhikkhunīs* had not yet come into existence at that time. We can clearly see that the structure of the four-fold community of Buddhists was the Buddha’s intention from the very beginning.

When Mahapajapati was ordained, she became a *bhikkhunī* simply by receiving the eight *garudhammas*, while the other Sakyan women – a large group of followers from Kapilvastu – became *bhikkhunīs* in an ordination (*upasampadā*) conducted by monks. The Buddha made this statement: “O *bhikkhus*, I allow *bhikkhus* to give ordination to *bhikkhunīs*”⁴ Please note that this allowance by the Buddha was never lifted; thus, it must be considered still valid.

The ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by the *bhikkhu sangha* alone continued for some time. Then there was an incident in which a woman candidate, out of shyness, refused to answer the questions (*antarayikadhamma*)⁵ and the ordination was not completed. The *bhikkhus* reported the matter to the Buddha.

When the Buddha heard about the situation, he understood the problem and decided to allow the *bhikkhunīs* to ask the questions. This was the first time that *bhikkhunīs* came into the ordination process. Their role was only to ascertain the suitability of the candidate, so that the candidate would be ready for the full ordination to be conducted later by the *bhikkhu sangha*. When the candidates appeared in front of the *bhikkhu sangha* for the ordination, they did not know how to request ordination properly. The *bhikkhus* complained about this, and so the *bhikkhunīs* had to prepare the candidates, so that they would not feel awkward when they appeared in front of the *bhikkhus*.

And it so happened that the *bhikkhunīs* who trained the candidates did not have sufficient knowledge and did not train the candidates properly. Then the *bhikkhus* had to appoint a *pavattinī*, that is, a *bhikkhunī* teacher who is knowledgeable, well trained, and has a proper understanding of the ordination procedure. A *bhikkhunī* who acts as a *pavattinī* and gives training to candidates without being appointed to do so commits a transgression (*apatti*). Thus, the *pavattinī* who trains candidates for *bhikkhunī* ordination must be appointed by the *bhikkhu sangha*.

When the *pavattinī* and *bhikkhunī sangha* train the candidate for the *upasampadā*, this is rehearsal. But this has been misunderstood, such that the *pavattinī* thinks that she is giving the ordination. In Sri Lanka, the involvement of the *bhikkhunīs* is even called the *pavattinī upājjhaya*. In fact, there is only one preceptor (*upājjhaya*) and that preceptor can only belong to the *bhikkhu sangha*.

Prior to the ordination held on November 29, 2014, I corresponded with Bhikkhu Dr. Kalupahana, who said that there is a *kammavaca* (Pali, meaning the recitation of requesting ordination)⁶ for *bhikkhunīs* in which the *bhikkhunīs* recite the necessary phrases for requesting the ordination. That is well and good, but it must be regarded as only a rehearsal and not an actual ordination.

Full ordination (*upasampadā*) is a *sanghakamma* and the same *sanghakamma* cannot be conducted twice for the same candidate. If it is conducted twice, then only the first instance is valid. If the *bhikkhunī sanghakamma* of ordination is valid, then why would the *bhikkhus* need to repeat it? The procedure that is prescribed makes it very clear that the *upasampadā* is conducted by the *bhikkhu sangha* only. The *kammavaca* of ordination that is performed by the *bhikkhunī sangha* is only a rehearsal to prepare the candidates, so that when they appear before the *bhikkhu sangha* they can conduct themselves properly.

This means that there is no dual ordination for *bhikkhunīs*, but only one ordination, which is conducted by the *bhikkhu sangha*. The *bhikkhunī sangha* assist with the questions to ascertain the qualification of the candidates and to help train the candidates, so that when they appear before the *bhikkhu sangha*, the *upasampadā* can be conducted properly.

One of the eight *garudhammas* says that one should seek ordination before both *sanghas*. This is true, because *bhikkhunīs* are needed to prepare the candidates for the ordination. But the ordination itself has always been given by the *bhikkhu sangha*. In brief, without the *bhikkhu sangha*, the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* is not possible.

Bringing *Bhikkhunī* Ordination to Thailand

The question is whether it is possible for the *bhikkhu sangha* to give ordination to *bhikkhunīs* in a situation, as in Thailand, where there is no *bhikkhunī sangha*. I believe that this is possible, providing that the candidates are ready to answer the questions (*antarayikadhamma*) directly before the *bhikkhu sangha*, as was the case originally. Also, if the candidates study the ordination procedure well, then they themselves will be able to request ordination (*upasampadā*) directly from the *bhikkhu sangha*.

There is a discrepancy now between the Theravada procedures for the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* in Thailand and in Sri Lanka. At the ordination in Thailand on November 29, 2014, the candidates were not *sāmanerīs*; they were all *sikkhamāṇās*, in accordance with the procedures prescribed in the *vinaya*. We owe a debt of gratitude to the monks in southern Thailand who kindly suggested that, in order for the monks to accept *bhikkhunīs* in Thai society, the first group needed to follow the *vinaya* very closely. Hence Bhikkhuni Dhammadipa, the chief nun of Thipayasathandhamma Bhikkhuni Arama, was careful to make sure that the candidates sought *sikkhamāṇā* ordination and observed the *sikkhamāṇā* for two years before receiving full ordination as *bhikkhunīs*.

There are three *bhikkhunī aramas* in Thailand that give *bhikkhunī* ordination only to *sikkhamāṇās*. At other *aramas*, nuns who are *sāmanerīs* proceed to Sri Lanka to receive *bhikkhunī* ordination without the *sikkhamāṇā* ordination.

Towards the end of the *upasampadā* described here, Maha Nayaka Mahindavamsa appointed me, a *bhikkhunī* who has completed 12 *vassas*,⁷ as the first *pavattinī* (*bhikkhunī* teacher) in Thailand. That afternoon, I conducted a *sāmanerī* ordination for 47 women who remained as *sāmanerīs* for nine days. The Council of Elders that oversees monastic Buddhism in Thailand lost no time in reacting to the news.

Thailand has a population of 67,000,000, 95% of whom are Buddhist, including approximately 300,000 monks. Thai monks come under the authority of the administrative body of

the Council of Elders, which consists of 20 committees headed by mostly senior monks from the two monastic sects of Buddhism in Thailand: ten from the Mahanikaya and ten from the Dhammayut.

As the news of this groundbreaking ordination began to spread, the Council of Elders met on December 11, 2014, and made an announcement stating that they do not accept the ordination and further declaring that there is no Theravada *bhikkhunī* ordination in Thailand. The same day, a spokesperson also said that the Council would send a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the effect that any monks coming from outside to give ordination to *bhikkhunīs* in Thailand must receive written permission from the Council.

The Thai government is now drafting a new constitution and a support group from the four-fold Buddhist community sent a letter of protest to the drafting committee. A representative of the committee promised that its members intend to find ways not only to provide space for *bhikkhunīs*, but also to address the larger issue of reforming Buddhism in Thailand.

***Bhikkhunī* Statistics**

Since my *bhikkhunī* ordination in 2001, many Thai women have been ordained, first as *sāmanerīs* and then as *sikkhamānas* and *bhikkhunīs*. There are at least 90 *bhikkhunīs* spread out over no less than 20 provinces across the country. At Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhuni Arama, my monastery, temporary *sāmanerī* ordination is conducted twice a year, in April and December. More than 500 women have experienced this temporary monastic ordination and lifestyle, and the ordination is spreading to other provinces as well.

These Thai *bhikkhunīs* generally continue to perform their duties according to the Dhamma and the *vinaya*, with support from Thai society. As long as the Council of Elders does not recognize the *bhikkhunī* ordination and the *bhikkhunīs* are therefore not under their control, these *bhikkhunīs* can continue to function as they do. There are certain monastic actions or procedures (*sanghakamma*) that monks must conduct on behalf of *bhikkhunīs*, such as giving instructions (*ovada*) twice a month.⁸ Fortunately, the *bhikkhunīs* are able to find senior monks in their areas to perform these duties according to the *vinaya*. The *bhikkhus* should teach the *vinaya* to the *bhikkhunīs*,⁹ as prescribed by the Buddha. The existence of *bhikkhunīs* depends on the *bhikkhus*. At a practical level, this can be observed by both the *bhikkhus* and the *bhikkhunīs*.

Unfortunately, however, the unfriendly attitude of the Council of Elders that prohibits Theravada *bhikkhunī* ordination in Thailand makes it more difficult for women to be fully ordained. Until recently, the women still needed to travel to Sri Lanka to receive ordination from the *bhikkhunī* lineage there and then return to settle in Thailand. Because the Thai sangha is regulated by the Sangha Act, all Thai monks under the authority of the Council of Elders are controlled under this Act. Going against the Sangha Act is risky; even though one may argue that the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* is permissible according to the Dhamma and the *vinaya*, it is not permissible by law. A monk or monks who do not observe the dictates of the Council may find themselves in trouble. Those who have been given titles, risk having those titles taken away, though not be to the extent of being forced to disrobe or of having committed a major transgression (*pārājika*, a “defeat”). As a consequence, there are monks in Thailand who are supportive of the *bhikkhunī sangha*, but are unable to do anything on their own because they are controlled by this law.

NOTES

¹ Seven of the nuns were from Thipayasathandhamma Bhikkhuni Arama in Koy Yoh and one was from Songdhammakalyani Bhikkhuni Arama in Nakhonpathom.

² A *pavattini* must be appointed by the *bhikkhu sangha*. It is *apatti* (a transgression) to train a candidate without being appointed.

³ At the ordination ceremony, the *kammavacarini* and the *anusavanacarini* stand together and they do the recitation together.

⁴ Cullavagga, Vinaya Pitaka.

⁵ Thai Tipitaka, vol. 7, Vinaya Pitaka, *Cullavagga Dutiyabhaga*, Bhikkhuni Khandaka, no. 573. For *bhikkhus*, there are 13 questions; for *bhikkhunīs*, there are 24. The questions that female candidates felt shy to answer were those that dealt with the private parts of the body.

⁶ Ibid., no. 578.

⁷ The term *vassa* refers to the annual rainy season retreat for monastics.

⁸ Ibid., no. 544.

⁹ Ibid., no. 532.

The Imaginariums of the Nuns: Days That Are Past and Futures That May Yet Be

Bhikkhu Sujato

Nuns exist only in the imagination. When I close my eyes, and focus on what is real, there are no nuns there. Nor, for that matter, are there any monks, or lay people, or anyone else. So if we are to talk about any of these kinds of people, we are telling a story – a story that has some relation to fact, we hope, but where the facts are filled in with copious amounts of imagination.

We imagine a past and call it “history.” We imagine a future and call it “vision.” We imagine the present and call it “reality.” Or, to be sadder but more accurate, in Buddhism we mostly just imagine a past and say that’s “the way it is,” and we never imagine any future at all.

But if we are to have a future, it will be a future with nuns, and specifically with *bhikkhunīs*. The alternative is to let Buddhism be owned by the patriarchs, who coopted the Dhamma, used it to accumulate power, prestige, and real estate, and who hang on to these things even as they fade away into irrelevance. But this is no future at all. There is tremendous vitality and energy within the Buddhist world, we can see it in so many ways everywhere we look. And none of it, none of the spark, the renewal, the creation of possible futures, is happening within the halls of the patriarchs.

I became interested in the *bhikkhunī* issue when I noticed, as many people do, that most of the people who come to learn and practice Dhamma are women. Why is this so? One patriarch in Thailand, so I heard, said it was because all the dedicated men have ordained as monks. Ridiculous; the same phenomenon is seen everywhere, in places where there are few monastics of any sort; and anyway, it’s the same in other religions as well.

I asked a man at my former monastery in Thailand, and he said, “It’s because the men are working hard and have no time to come to the monastery.” “Funny,” I thought, “I always seem to see women working hard in the villages and men lounging around all day.”

So I did something very few monks ever seem to think of: I asked a woman for her opinion. She said, “It’s because the men prefer to go gambling, drinking, and whoring while their wives are at the temple.”

Tempting as it is, I don’t think that’s really the answer either. These are just imaginariums: worlds we live in that we build from our own thoughts and ideas. These worlds have some relation to the facts, but they are flexible and uncertain.

In my own imaginarium, the real reason why most spiritual seekers are women is because they are disempowered. It is because the opportunities for them in other spheres of life have been successively blocked or restricted. In addition to the absolute barriers of overtly sexist cultural constructs, there is the more subtle, pervasive, and ultimately more damaging “soft sexism,” which does not actually stop women from doing anything, but adds a grit to whatever women do, slowing them down, and making everything more work than it needs be. Everything is harder for women than it is for men.

So, they end up turning inwards. Let go of the external: you’ll never change it anyway, right? Change yourself; that’s the real Dhamma anyway.

Last year we had a series of *sutta* discussions in Sydney, and invited a panel of young people to help out. One of the guys was seriously manspacing. You know what I mean: men taking up too much space – an unconscious assertion of male privilege.¹ One of the women politely asked him to restrain himself, as it was seriously difficult for them to fit at the table. One of the other women

jumped in and said, “Shouldn’t we just take this as a practice and let it go?” This is an example of how patriarchy gets internalized and women become its best defenders. Meanwhile, the guy did shrink his space – by about an inch or two. He was still taking up twice as much space as the women, apparently oblivious to the fact, even when it was pointed out. And the women exhausted their energies on the issue by disagreeing with each other. This is how the patriarchy wins.

When we talk about Buddhist history, we talk about what we imagine. The facts, such as they are, are barely relevant. A patriarch once said to me that we can’t have *bhikkhunīs*, because “It’s been like this since the beginning”.

When I started working on this issue, I took this attitude as a challenge and investigated the history of *bhikkhunīs*. Like others before me and since, I found that this simply was not the case. In the beginning, there *were bhikkhunīs*. There were also *bhikkhunīs* when Buddhism went to Sri Lanka and, according to our oldest records (the Sri Lankan *vinaya* commentaries, found in both Pāli and Chinese), there were *bhikkhunīs* when Buddhism was founded in Suvarabhūmi (Myanmar/Thailand). But when I tried to bring these and many other findings to the attention of monks, I was disappointed to find they were not very interested. Patriarchs are proud of their history and try to maintain everything exactly as they imagine it was. When the facts at our disposal disagree with these imaginations, they are brushed aside. The past is not a reality; it is just another imaginarium.

I was very naïve. I thought that if the monks could learn about the situation, we would respond in an informed, compassionate manner. How wrong I was! What struck me was how little reason there was in the discussion, and how much energy. Whenever *bhikkhunīs* were mentioned, otherwise reasonable men came up with all kinds of absurd, irrational statements, pushed by a palpable psychic force: a compulsive need to deny the reality of *bhikkhunīs* at all costs. Many of the patriarchs are, it seems, quite willing to destroy themselves and their religion in order to deny *bhikkhunīs*.

I wrote a book about these things and I called it *White Bones Red Rot, Black Snakes*. It is the longest and most complex thing I have ever written or probably ever will write. I like it, but I think hardly anyone has read it. It’s a book about myth, about magic, about taboo, about bodily fluids, about imagination, and about darkness – all things that do not sit easily with how we like to think about Buddhism. But the gist of the book is simple. I’ll summarize it point by point, so you don’t have to read the whole thing. (But you should. It has very nice pictures.)

1. How we think about *bhikkhunīs* in the present is conditioned (not determined!) by how Buddhists thought about *bhikkhunīs* in the past;
2. How *bhikkhunīs* were thought of in the past is part of how women were thought of in the past;
3. How women were thought of in the past includes dark and bright aspects; and
4. All this happens in the minds of men.

If we are to imagine a future, then there are many things it may be, but one thing it must be is fully human. We can no longer let half of humanity arrogate the Dhamma to itself. The future of the Dhamma is human, and that is all of us.

The sight of a monastic is one of humanity’s most recognizable, powerful, and durable

symbols. It was the sight of a monastic – the robes, the shaven head, the bowl – that inspired the *bodhisatta*, Prince Siddhartha, to go forth from home to homelessness, in the hope of putting an end to suffering. Probably each of us has had a similar experience of this symbol. I have a very old, very dim memory – just a half-grasped echo – of a nun, a Buddhist nun, on a television show, probably Australian ABC, probably a documentary made in the 1970s. That is my earliest image of a Buddhist monastic. I don't know who she was, but thank you: your image was mysterious, challenging, and haunting. You made a difference.

Monastics bear these signs externally. And that, for men anyway, is very easy. You can go to Thailand, show up at any of 1,000 monasteries, and get ordained this weekend. No problems, no questions. You're a *bhikkhu* and you are the genuine heir to the Dhamma – or at least that's how a male monastic's external image is perceived. Inside, of course, is another matter.

This is an area where women are the experts. Women are used to being judged and judging on appearances. Femininity is a performance, to be beholden and to be criticized, by men and women. If you are a human being who happens to be female, becoming a monastic is a decision to stop the performance of femininity. For monks, whose monasticism is also a performance, this is not easy to accept.

Mahākassapa sometimes doesn't have such a good reputation when it comes to women's issues. He comes across as a bit of a grumpy old monk who doesn't think too much of women. One of the many pleasant surprises I came across while writing *White Bones Red Rot Black Snakes* was that his story, as imagined by the Buddhist community, reveals a powerful and moving insight into how femininity is performed

To be very brief, when Mahākassapa was a young man, his family wanted him to marry. But he didn't want to, so he set an impossible task for himself. He made a beautiful statue of gold of the perfect woman and he said he would only marry a woman who looked like that. Well, that was no easy matter, but messengers set out across the country, exhibiting the statue in markets and town squares. Nowhere could they find a woman so beautiful. One day, an old nursemaid came up to the statue and gave it a slap, thinking it was Bhaddā Kāpilānī, the daughter of her family, who apparently matched this ideal image. And so the marriage was arranged. Bhaddā, it turned out, was no more interested in marriage than the young man was. The two exchanged letters, but the letters were intercepted and destroyed by their families. (Notice that both were equally literate.) The two were married, but agreed to live a chaste life, with a garland of flowers lain between them in bed. When the time came, they went forth and both became *arahants*.

There is an interesting coda to this idealized love story. The story is found, so far as I know, only in a Tibetan source. Even as a nun, Bhaddā was so stunning that when she went to the village for alms, she had to endure the catcalls of men. So on her life's journey, she was joined to Mahākassapa, because of her appearance. She was all image, like a statue. Through her connection with him, in a relation of mutual support and respect, they both found a path to a truer inner reality. She let go of her image and consciously chose the external signs of a renunciant to announce her inward journey. Yet the men making catcalls did not respect her choice any more than the patriarchs today respect the choices of women. When Mahākassapa heard about this, he offered to help. "Stay, Bhaddā," he said. "You shouldn't have to put up with this. I will collect alms for you." Here we have, so far as I know, the first time in history that a man helped a woman deal with sexual harassment in the workplace.

Ask people who work in the field of development and they will tell you that the key to prosperity in any country is empowering women. A Google image search for “meditation” yields images mostly of women. (The images are usually white, slim, pretty young women, signaling that meditation has a diversity problem. But that’s a topic for another time.) It is obvious that if the future of Buddhism is to take a healthy form,, it will include women.

We can continue to imagine a past where there were no women, or where women were content to offer food and wash robes for the monks. And we can long for a future where this simple, reassuring bit of fantasy is the only reality. But this future will never exist.

In our minds now, the future has the same dreamy haze as the imagined past. The difference is this: In every moment, that dreamy haze collides with the reality of the present. We’re tumbling headlong into a future and our dreams are constantly being exposed in the pitiless light of day. If we imagine a past where women are forever the lesser and the “other,” we’re in for a bumpy ride. But if we imagine a past where humanity is *lived*, in all its depravity and glory, then maybe we can start to imagine a future for Buddhism that is *living*.

History is on our side. We don’t have to do much of anything, just stay the course. The day of the patriarchs is over. But there is one thing that, more than anything else, can derail the future for nuns. And that is if the nuns start acting like the patriarchs.

We – and here I mean the monks who have supported the nuns – have given everything so that women can live as fully ordained nuns. To do so, we received no support from our peers and we have had to go against the power structures and hierarchies of our respective orders.

We are happy to do that, because we know that those hierarchies are not the Dhamma. They are not *vinaya*. In large measure, in fact, they are the exact opposite of the Dhamma and the *vinaya*. The notion that the *sangha* should be governed by a politically appointed hierarch, authorized by an act of Parliament, and imposing his will on the *sangha*, is a feudal system of governance that was reinvented in modern times. Yet in recent months, we have seen monks in Thailand – even so-called “forest” monks – marching on the streets of Bangkok to protect their right to be governed by a feudal hierarchy.

The *vinaya* as taught by the Buddha is all about collective ownership, decision making by consensus, and the rule of principle. No monastic has the power of command over any other. All monastics must participate in important decisions. It is the *sangha*, and the *sangha* alone, that has the power when it comes to making decisions in accordance with the *vinaya*. The *vinaya* gives nuns the power to choose their own destiny: to make their own decisions, to build their own monasteries, to run their own communities, and to do their own teaching.

Buddhist nuns now have a once-in-a-lifetime chance to do away with the feudal hierarchies. Don’t choose hierarchy over *vinaya*. Don’t choose to let this happen, and then, when it doesn’t work out, undermine your own authority by asking monks to fix it.

Let’s be clear: top-down hierarchies do not work. They create dysfunctional, sclerotic, out-of-touch institutions. In countries like Thailand, people talk of the need to reform the *sangha* hierarchies. But reform is what is done to correct something that is basically okay and needs to be improved. What the hierarchies need is not reform, but abolition. They’re dead weight. Get rid of them and Buddhism will be much better off.

This why the Buddha deliberately set up his *sangha*: to undermine hierarchy, by rejecting the preeminence of the *brahmins* and the nobility, by empowering every single member of his *sangha*.

Let the Buddha's *sangha* be your *sangha*, and let the Buddha's *vinaya* be your *vinaya*. Hierarchies serve only the desires of men to control real estate and other worldly assets. In Buddhism, vitality comes from those who reject the hierarchies and work outside them.

Let me leave you with one of my favorite lines from the *pātimokkha*:

evam samvaddhā hi tassa bhagavato parisā yadidam aññamaññavacanena aññamañña-vutthāpanena

For this is how there comes to be growth in the Buddha's following, that is, with mutual admonishment and mutual rehabilitation.²

NOTES

¹ <http://mentakingup2muchspaceonthetrain.tumblr.com>

² Pali *bhikkhuni sa ghādisesa* 16, *bhikkhu sa ghādisesa* 12.

Pious Lady, Noble Woman: Relationships between Lay Women and Nuns in the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhikṣunī Vinaya*¹

Amy Paris Langenberg

The *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhikṣunī Vinaya* is one of two complete nuns' *vinayas* surviving in an Indic language, the other being the Pāli *vinaya*.² The *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhikṣunī Vinaya* is remarkable in that it appears have been edited in order to provide a comprehensive set of rules, principles, and procedures for nuns, easily detachable from the monks' *vinaya*. In it, the story of the founding of the nuns' order, along with an account of the eight grave duties (*gurudharmas*), are supplied at the beginning of the text, just before the nuns' *prātimoksa* (the list of vows taken at higher ordination), as an introduction. In the Pāli and Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinayas*, by contrast, these appear much later, with the miscellaneous rules. In the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhikṣunī Vinaya*, moreover, the relevant *karmavācanās* (formal monastic procedures) are handily collected under each *gurudharma*. Furthermore, unlike the Pāli *Bhikṣunīvibhanga* (the canonical exposition of the nuns' *prātimoksa*) that only lists nuns' rules not shared by the monks, the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhikṣunī Vinaya* includes the shared rules, though in an extremely abbreviated form. Overall, the text exhibits a tendency to rearrange, reconcile, and, as Üte Hüsken observes, "rationalize the material," so as to create a smooth, coherent, logically organized document ideal for recitation and study by nuns.³

This understudied nun-centered *vinaya* text is a rich source for narrative accounts of the ancient nuns' community. Today, I will focus on a number of narratives from this text that describe and prescribe nuns' interactions with laywomen. In these narratives, the interactions between lay and ordained women go far beyond a simple exchange of alms for merit and teachings. More often than not, laywomen encourage and support nuns in their monastic status, helping their monastic sisters to negotiate a social environment that is not always supportive of female monasticism. At times, the helping hand is extended in the other direction. In one story, for instance, when the nun Sthūlanandā approaches a wealthy house for alms, one of ladies of the house begs her to carry away a stillborn fetus in her begging bowl. What is revealed in these narratives is a complex monastic/lay relationship of reciprocal care, cooperation and, at times, collusion in the face of pervasive male authority and privilege.

Let me provide some examples. The introductory story to *pācattika dharma* 84 describes a group of nuns who, having been invited for a meal by the devout laywoman Viśākā, want to return the favor by cleaning, carding, and spinning raw cotton for her. Viśākā scolds them, expressing her preference that they behave as specialized religious rather than ordinary women:

The Lord was staying at Śrāvastī. Viśākā, mother of Mṛgāra, invited both communities for a meal. Some nuns, going there early in the morning, said, "Pious lady, since you have invited both communities for a meal, can we perform a service for the pious lady (in return)?" She replied, "What service should the noble ones perform? You explain. You recite. You think deeply. In that way you do me a service." "But we will also perform this service. After some go to the roof to get the cotton, others will treat it. Some others will tear it off [the husk]. Others will clean it. Some others will separate it. Others still will spin it. Then taking the ball of thread, they will approach the pious lady, [saying] 'Pious lady, a

service has been rendered.” She replied. “That the noble ones would clean or roll or rend or spin cotton is not a service to me. Rather I benefit if you noble ones, having eaten my food, explain and recite [the *sūtras*] so that you are established in the teachings of the Buddhas.”⁴

Here, offering something like the sort of homely and intimate assistance a friend might provide to another female friend, the nuns intend to spread out throughout the house in order to help with the various tasks involved in processing cotton. It is Viśākā herself who scolds them for behaving as ordinary female friends would. Rather, she insists that they step into a role more fitting of a monastic – that of receiver of alms and reciter of *sūtras*.

Bhiksuni prakīrnaka 31 of the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottarvāda Bhiksuni Vinaya* demonstrates how lay and monastic women colluded in order to negotiate the mores surrounding female virtue, modesty, and sexuality in the ancient Indian milieu. In the introductory story for this rule, Sudinnā, wife of Sudinna, is said to have entered the spiritual life after her husband died. Unfortunately, Sudinna’s brother claims levirate rights to her and pursues her through the streets. Afraid, she takes refuge in the home of a particular laywoman, explaining:

“I think I will be forced to abandon my state of purity,” [Sudinnā] said. “By whom?” [the lady] asked. “My husband’s brother is harassing me. He wishes to marry me,” she answered. “Come inside, mother. We will protect you.” She replied, “I will go to the Āryā. The Āryā will protect me.” They attached anklets, affixed earrings, put on bracelets, ornamented her, draped her with red garments, concealed her [under a veil] and surrounded her by four or five female attendants. That man, standing in the doorway, watched them thinking, “When she comes out, I will grab her.” When he saw her coming out he thought, “She must be a housewife surrounded by servants. That one is no nun.”⁵

The kind laywoman dresses and adorns Sudinnā as if she was an affluent housewife and surrounds her with servants. In this disguise, she is able to escape from her brother-in-law and make her way safely back to the nunnery. But there, she is seen and criticized for abandoning the deportment of a nun. As a result, the Lord issues a rule that a nun who abandons the proper deportment and dress of a nun out of ethical wantonness becomes “not-a-nun” (*abhiksuni bhavati*). Those who do so only out a wish for protection, do not commit a fault. This seems to leave the door open for leniency in event of similar exigencies in the future.

Health and medicine appear to have been an arena in which monastic and laywomen were particularly likely to enter into relationships of collaboration and even collusion. Scholars of Buddhist medicine agree that monastics were mandated to heal and nurse one another, but could legally provide medical care only to certain laypeople and to others only indirectly. A closer examination of *vinaya* sources shows that this ambivalence was gendered in interesting ways. The *vinaya* authorities regulated nuns’ involvement in the healing arts and other types of service with special care. In one story from the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottarvāda Bhiksuni Vinaya (pāccatika-dharma* 82), we hear of a lay/monastic female collaboration around healthcare that results in legal censure:

The Lord was staying at Kauśāmbī. A nun, mother of Chandaka, was accepted in the inner

household of the king. She was skillful with root medicines, leaf medicines, and fruit medicines. With the king's relatives, the ministers' relatives, merchants' families, and [other] excellent families, she established a hostel for women. She cured fainting fits. She offered medical treatments such as black ointment, [other] ointments, emetics, purgatives, sweat-treatments, nasal treatments, and bloodletting. Before she left, she received soft food and hard food. Then the nuns found out. "This is not a renouncer," they said, "This is a doctor (*vaidyikā*)." The nuns informed Mahāprajāpatī about the situation. [She informed the Lord.] The Lord said, "Summon the mother of Chandaka." She was summoned. The Lord said, "Is it true, mother of Chandaka, that you make a living by your knowledge of medicine (*cikitsita-vidyā*)?" "Yes, Lord." "This is badly done, mother of Chandaka. It is not suitable to make your living by your knowledge of medicine." And so the Lord declared . . . : "Whichever nun makes a living by knowledge of medicine commits a fault requiring expiation."⁶

In this story, the nun Chandakamātā (mother of Chandaka) has opened a sort of clinic where she treats upper-class women. She administers a variety of treatments and is characterized as a skilled herbalist. Although she does not accept direct payment, she receives food from the women she treats. Eventually, the Buddha declares that it is unacceptable for nuns to make their living in this way.

Scholars of Buddhist medicine agree that monastics are mandated to heal and nurse one another, but should provide medical care only to certain laypeople and to others only indirectly.⁷ A closer examination of *vinaya* sources shows, however, that this ambivalence is gendered in interesting ways. The *vinaya* authorities' close attention to nuns' involvement in the healing arts and other types of service indicates that nuns were more likely than monks to take up community work, especially the work of healing. Monks were also officially discouraged from publicly engaging in the healing arts, but this prohibition occurs only in the *Dīgha-nikāya*, not in the *vinaya* itself, and therefore carries less weight from a legal point of view. If the monastic authorities were more concerned with the medical activities of nuns, this probably indicates that nuns were more likely to act as healers.

In fact, this is not surprising, if perhaps nuns were more likely than their male counterparts to offer healing services to the laity and their children. Given the social constraints forced upon laywomen and the nuns' reliance on female lay support, it makes sense that these two groups of women would sometimes enter into partnerships based on mutual need when it came to matters of health. Certain problems related to reproductive health or the health of children would not have been willingly shared with male family members or may simply have concerned women more than they did men. Sthūlanandā's agreement to carry away a miscarried fetus in her begging bowl is a case in point. This story is found at *bhiksunī prakīrnaka* 32 of the *Mahāsānghika-lokottarvāda Bhiksunī Vinaya*:

The Lord was staying at Śrāvastī. The nun Sthūlanandā was on begging rounds. She approached a great and superior household for alms. There, a stillborn male child [had been born] to a woman. She said to her, "Noble lady! Take this child away! Please take it, Noble lady! I will give you something." "I will not take this away," said the nun. "I will give you anything and everything!" [The woman pleaded]. Greedy, [Sthūlanandā] replied, "Put it in this bowl." After covering it, she left. The elder Mahākāśyapa had gone forth on his begging

rounds. But the elder had made a commitment that “I will present the first alms obtained to a monk or nun.” Then he saw [Sthūlanandā] and said, “Give your bowl here” She pulled [the bowl] away and covered [it], so as not to show it. The elder said, “Give your bowl here.” Rebuked by the eminent elder, equivalent to the Teacher [himself], she trembled and offered him the bowl. The fetus [was seen] by the elder, who said, “Alas! What a thing she has done!” The Venerable Mahākāśyapa reported this situation to the monks, who reported to the Lord. The Lord said, “Summon [Sthūla]nandā.” She was summoned. She was questioned. “Yes, it happened in that way, Lord,” [she confessed.] The Lord said, “You have committed an infraction, [Sthūla]nandā. This is not the Dharma. This is not the Vinaya. It is like this: You covered your bowl, but it is not fitting to cover the bowl.

This is the situation concerning covering the bowl. It is not appropriate for a nun to go for alms with an open bowl. She is to go with it covered. Just as she covers the alms (at first), having uncovered it, it is to be covered [again]. If she sees a monk in the road, she should uncover her bowl and reveal [its contents]. A nun who goes with a bowl uncovered transgresses the discipline. If, seeing a monk, she shows [her bowl] without uncovering it, she transgresses the discipline. This is said regarding covering the bowl.⁸

Interestingly, Sthūlanandā is criticized merely for covering her bowl, not for assisting her female lay patron by disposing of her miscarried child. As in the story about Sudinna’s wife, the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottarvāda Bhiksunī Vinaya* mentions but does not directly censor certain forms of unorthodox lay-monastic interaction made necessary by a social environment that was highly restrictive, and sometimes dangerous, for women.

The research presented here is preliminary. As my study of this nun-centered *Bhiksunī Vinaya* develops, I look forward to a further investigation of the theme of female lay-monastic cooperation in the ancient *sangha*. For now, I note that nuns and Buddhist laywomen appear to cooperate and sometimes collude in the *Mahāsāṅghika-lokottarvāda Bhiksunī Vinaya* stories analyzed here, particularly regarding matters of health and safety. Sometimes nuns and laywomen work together in ways that challenge or subvert male authority. In the story of Viśākhā, a laywoman refuses to accept domestic help from nuns, supporting the special monastic status of and encouraging their religious practice. This story is the most interesting to me, because it suggests that lay and monastic women cooperated not only in matters of necessity, but also in matters of aspiration.

NOTES

¹ Parts of this paper have been adapted from two previously published articles: Amy Paris Langenberg, “Mahāsāṅghika-lokottaravāda Bhiksunī Vinaya: The Intersection of Womanly Virtue and Buddhist Asceticism,” in *Women in Early Indian Buddhism: Comparative Textual Studies*, ed. by Alice Collett, 80-96 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Amy Paris Langenberg, “Female Monastic Healing and Midwifery: A View from the Vinaya Tradition,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21(2014) 152–87.

² For the Sanskrit text, see Gustav Roth, *Bhiksunī-Vinaya: Including Bhiksunī-prakīrnaka and a Summary of the Bhikṣu-Prakīrnaka of the Ārya-Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravādin* (Patna: K.P.

Jayaswal Research Institute, 1970). For a French translation, see Édith Nolot, *Règles de Discipline Des Nonnes Bouddhistes: Le Bhiksuniṅvinaya de L'École Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravādin* (Paris: Collège de France, 1991). For an English translation of the Chinese text, see Akira Hirakawa, *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns: An English Translation of the Chinese Text of the Mahasamghika-Bhiksuniṅ-Vinaya* (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1982).

³ Üte Hüsken, “A Stock of Bowls Requires a Stock of Robes: Relations of the Rules for Nuns in the Theravāda Vinaya and the Bhiksuniṅ-Vinaya of the Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravādin,” *Untersuchungen zur Buddhistischen Literature. Zweite Folge, Gustav Roth zum 80* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), p. 228.

⁴ All translations are mine from the Sanskrit. Roth, *Bhiksuniṅ-Vinaya*, pp. 222–23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷ See, for instance, Paul Demiéville, *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville's Article “Byo” from Hobogirin*, translated by Mark Tatz (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985).

⁸ Roth, *Bhiksuniṅ-Vinaya*, pp. 316–317.

A Buddhist Nun as Military Hero in the Tale of Master Chaun

Hyangsoon Yi

This article is concerned with an oral legend about Bhiksuni Sŏn Master Chaun (Purple Cloud) that has been circulated in the southwestern region of Korea since the 17th century.¹ This legend features Chaun's heroic participation in sea battles during the Imjin War (1592-1598). Buddhist history shows several instances in which armed monastics engaged in military conflict. As might be expected, all of them involve only monks. This tendency is also true of late 16th-century Korea, when a number of Buddhist monks were mobilized to fight Japanese invaders. The tale of Master Chaun is the first and perhaps the only case in Korean Buddhist history and literature that presents a female monastic as a brilliant naval commander. In this presentation, I will examine the historical basis of Chaun's legend, the extraordinary portrayal of the Buddhist nun as a military hero, and the socio-political, cultural, and religious significance of this powerful *bhiksuni* protagonist.

My field research in Korea's southern coastal regions and islands demonstrates that the legend of Chaun originated from the real-life story of the *bhiksu* Master Chaun (Compassionate Cloud) who was the leader of the monastic unit within Admiral Yi Sunsin's fleet during the Imjin War. Chaun made distinct contributions to Korea's victorious naval war with Japan, but his life is largely veiled in mystery. Historical materials that can testify to his public activities are scant, and even the dates of his birth and death are unidentifiable. Chaun's involvement in Admiral Yi's naval operations is mentioned in passing in the local gazetteer of the town called Kurye.² Fortunately, Yi Pun's 16th-century text *Haengnok* (Records of Actions) offers the following description of Chaun's activities:

Buddhist monks in the southwestern region performed a memorial rite for Admiral Yi, and there were no temples that did not do this. Among these monks was Chaun who followed around Admiral Yi's battle camps, always making great contributions as the commander of monk soldiers. After Admiral Yi passed away, he conducted a Water and Land Rite at Noryang with 600 sacks of rice and even performed memorial rituals [for Admiral Yi] at the Ch'ungmin Shrine by offering splendid sacrificial food.³

The above passage reveals that Chaun survived the war and commemorated Admiral Yi for many years. It seems that he lived at least 35 years more from the end of the war in 1598. This calculation is based on a record Chaun made in 1633 to celebrate the renovation project of Hŭngguksa Temple.⁴

With regard to Chaun's monastic career, snippets of information are available in two *stupas* dedicated to him. One of them is in Hwaŏmsa, his home temple where he took a vow as a novice monk, and the other is in Silsangsa, which he repaired in the post-war period. The stone inscriptions show that Chaun passed the most advanced subject (*hwaŏmdaesŏn*) in the state examination, which those who wanted to become a monk in Chosŏn had to take. Thus, it can duly be surmised that Chaun had an outstanding knowledge of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*.

The shortage of reliable historical materials makes it nearly impossible to reconstruct Chaun's life fully and accurately. One cannot but wonder why there is such a paucity of documented information on him if he was widely recognized by his contemporaries for his prominent scholarship as well as his distinguished military achievements. While no easy explanation can be found on this

oddity, a comment by Chinok, Abbot of Sökch'ōnsa Temple, is worth attention. In my interview with him in July 2012, Chinok stated that Chaun belonged to the lineage of Master Puhyu, not Sōsan who succeeded the main line of Korean Sōn.⁵ In other words, Chaun was not on the winning side in the Sōn genealogy war in Chosōn's Buddhist tradition. The monastic rivalry in doctrinal or spiritual matters might have discouraged Chaun's disciples from securing a detailed biography of their teacher. Possibly for this and other inexplicable reasons, Chaun's historical existence has gone into oblivion, only to be revived through a legend.

Unlike his obscure historicity, Chaun's presence in the fictional world commands nothing but awe. Anecdotes from unofficial "field" histories characterize Bhiksu Chaun as a champion of military science and arts and moreover as an awakened being with supernatural abilities.⁶ The grand image of Bhiksu Chaun is mirrored in the tale of Bhiksuni Chaun. In the legend, Chaun's transition from history to story is signaled by changes in his Dharma name and gender: the historical Bhiksu Compassionate Cloud was reborn as the fictional Bhiksuni Purple Cloud.

While the two homonymic names exhibit the playful underlying folk spirit of the tale, Chaun's metamorphosis from a male to a female poses serious critical issues. On the simplest level of interpretation, Chaun's gender shift can be understood as a means to increase the dramatic effect of the story. In pro-Confucian Chosōn, a war narrative centered on a Buddhist nun probably elicited sensational reactions from the public.

More importantly, in the legend Bhiksuni Chaun is portrayed as a deliverer of the nation. Given the pariah status of nuns in Chosōn's rigidly stratified class structure, the idea of elevating a nun to the status of a national hero is simply inconceivable. This extraordinary phenomenon, however, exposes widespread skepticism among the populace about the existing social order. The legend of Chaun, without a doubt, reflects the messianic aspirations of the desperate people who were caught in the hellish war. The Imjin War was a most devastating experience for Chosōn Koreans. While the majority of lower-class people were suffering helplessly under brutal enemy swords, the king and his entourage abandoned the palace in Seoul and escaped to safe places far north. Profoundly disillusioned with the central government's irresponsible and inefficient handling of the national crisis, the masses must have been yearning for a larger-than-life figure who would deliver them miraculously from their unfathomable sense of loss.

Indeed, Chaun's gender switch resonates with literary messianism that tends to identify a deliverer in the least likely corners of society. As a social outcast, the nun in late Chosōn fits such a messianic tradition well. In the 16th and 17th centuries, nuns remained a marginal group in mainstream Korean society, unlike monks who gained unprecedented visibility and social recognition due to their patriotic sacrifices during the war. Considering the low-keyed existence of nuns in general, Bhiksuni Chaun's ascendancy to the position of a military leader helps measure the level of frustration and exasperation of the masses. The figure of this Buddhist nun probably signified everything antithetical to the Confucian patriarchy, the ideological backbone of the ruling elites of the dynasty. The nun's refusal to conform to Confucian familial patterns was misconstrued by the establishment as subversive to the official ideology of the state. Therefore, by dramatizing the nun's potential to excel in the ultimate masculine domain of warfare, the legend of Master Chaun divulges an iconoclastic strand in post-war folk sentiments toward the male-hegemonic institutions.

As the protagonist of the folktale, Chaun is endowed with spiritual nobility, professional knowledge, and practical skills that are necessary for successful military operations at sea. Her

leadership traits are insinuated in the opening episode in which a strange boat shows up repeatedly near Admiral Yi's training camp. By luring the camp guards to chase her boat, only to fail at capturing it, Chaun succeeds in having her mysterious identity and excellent navigation skills reported to the admiral. The tantalizing hide-and-seek game that she initiates culminates with the admiral's decision to meet with her. Their first encounter enables Chaun to reveal her prophetic vision of an impending foreign invasion and the enormous calamity that might befall the kingdom.

While capturing the reader's instant attention at the outset of the tale, the motif of Chaun's mystery boat also throws light on her superior qualifications to train Admiral Yi for naval warfare. At the end of his first meeting with Chaun, Admiral Yi "reverently entreated [her] to teach him effective strategies for fending off foreign enemies." In response to his solemn request, Chaun gave him "two books on military science": *Muajisim* (Mind of Non-self) and *Chisōngchisim* (Mind of Utmost Earnestness). From these book titles, it is clear that Chaun recommended a Buddhist way of mind training for Admiral Yi as the best strategy.⁷ Chaun also makes clandestine visits to him by night to instruct him on "combat skills, ship-building technology, climatology, and marine geography."

Chaun and Yi's master-disciple relationship remains covert in their public interactions. She conducts herself with humility and obedience according to their different class backgrounds and military ranks. Before the war, her principal role is cultivating Yi's ability for naval leadership. But as soon as the war breaks out, as she prophesied, she performs other vital duties, including advising him on strategies and tactics in the battlefield. Most astounding of all is her direct engagement in combat. Starting with the Okp'o Battle on May 4, 1592, which marks the first clash between the Korean and Japanese fleets, she engages in a series of naval battles until September 1, 1592, when she is killed in action during the Pusanp'o Battle.

The first and the last battles highlight different aspects of Chaun's characterization. The Okp'o Battle features her bravery and modesty. The tale describes Admiral Yi as mentally ready for this battle, but somewhat hesitant to charge because he was "not confident about his geographical knowledge of the waters near Pusan." "At this moment," the narrator emphasizes, "Master Chaun suddenly appeared in a marine-colored uniform. Showing a nautical chart [to Admiral Yi], she entreated, 'Please permit this humble soldier to lead this battle.'" Admiral Yi willingly grants her wish, and the Korean navy under her command destroys thirty enemy ships, bringing the first triumph to the despairing nation. Her gallantry continues, as she wins five or six more great victories one after another. By curtailing the enemy hostilities for the first time since the outbreak of the war, she rescues Chosŏn from a total defeat to Japan. Her successes are, however, reported to the king under the name of Admiral Yi, who is rewarded with a promotion. Chaun's humble nature is underscored when she insists on maintaining a low profile in her military feats. When the admiral says he intends to report on her accomplishments, the self-deprecating nun emphatically protests against it, "threatening" that she will resign if he informs the government of her assistance.

While the Okp'o Battle underlines Chaun's valor as a warrior, the Pusanp'o Battle profiles her as a sagacious prophet. The two narrative events focus on her physical and mental prowess, respectively. The Pusanp'o Battle brings Chaun's life to a grand but tragic finale by underscoring her visionary leadership. When she learns of Chosŏn's plans to launch an all-out attack on the enemies at Pusanp'o, she expresses strong objections from the beginning. Yet when she realizes that the commanders' decision to engage in this operation cannot be revoked despite their "lack of

preparations,” she is resigned to their inevitable execution of the plan and remarks: “Since this campaign is disadvantageous [to Chosŏn], I will try to modify my strategy.” Although there is no mention of what strategy she initially conceived, her altered role, as it turns out in the actual naval maneuver, is geared toward moral encouragement rather than physical engagement. The fight turns out to be as tough as she predicted, which validated her foresight belatedly. Throughout the chaotic combat, she resolutely positions herself at the head of the flotilla, waving a large flag to boost the morale of the troops. It is during this courageous action as a spiritual leader that she suddenly collapses, hit by an enemy bullet. Implicit in this climactic scene is Chaun’s unflinching commitment to protecting Admiral Yi; she is shot at the moment she turns around to urge him to retreat.

Chaun’s heroic death has an important thematic function on multiple planes. From a historical point of view, it serves as a means to commemorate General Chŏng Un, who himself perished in the Battle of Pusanp’o. This commemorative effect is produced by setting Chaun’s final moment in Morundae, the place of Chŏng’s demise. The two war heroes are then linguistically linked by double homonyms. Their names share the character “*un*,” which, when translated as “move” and “cloud,” respectively, creates a pun. The character “*mor*” in Morundae also has double meanings: “cover” and “fall.” Morundae often becomes invisible due to sea fog and clouds; hence its name, “Cliff Covered with Clouds.”

Since the Battle of Pusanp’o, Morundae has acquired a second meaning: the “cliff of the fallen heroes.” Due to the shared sound “*un*” in their names, Chaun’s passing at Morundae triggers the sad memory of General Chŏng Un. Nicknamed Admiral Yi’s “right arm,” Chŏng was revered for his moral integrity. Chŏng’s demise thus caused profound grief to many Koreans, who were disenchanted with the incompetent and selfish nobility at large. By recalling General Chŏng in folk memories, Chaun’s death serves to intensify the elegiac ambience of the Morundae cliff.

As a priestess, Chaun’s fall in the bloody high sea also takes on a ritualistic connotation in accordance with the mythical motif of offering a virgin as a sacrificial victim to the underwater dragon king. In Korean folklore, the maritime practice of sacrificially offering a maiden is adumbrated by the famous narrative: “Tale of Simch’ŏng.” The ancient idea of sacrificing the pure body of a consecrated female as a way of appeasing a wrathful deity puts a distinctly folk-religious spin on Chaun’s martyrdom. In the tale of Simch’ŏng, the scapegoating of the heroine ensures the safety of the mariners who sail through the rough waters of Imdang. Similarly, Chaun’s sacrifice leads to the Korean navy’s victory in the turbulent seas of Morundae and Pusanp’o, despite their initially grim prospects of winning the battle.

The ultimate thematic upshot of Chaun’s noble death, however, manifests in the Confucian Chosŏn court’s affirmation of her spiritual superiority. The elevated state she occupies is indicated by the “peaceful smile” on her face at the moment of dying. Her patriotism is at last recognized when the king posthumously confers upon her the title of the Chief State Councilor (*yŏngŭijŏng*). The court also changes her name from “Purple Cloud” to “Compassionate Cloud,” fully acknowledging the central Buddhist teaching that she embodied and enacted. The most astonishing reward is the court’s official exaltation of Chaun as the “protective deity” of the nation. The nun is finally decorated as the messiah of the Confucian Chosŏn Dynasty.

The tale of Master Chaun is a rare piece of literature, whose importance goes far beyond the value of a dramatic war epic. The nun super-hero in popular literature provides an invaluable insight into the turbulent socio-cultural milieu of 17th-century Korea. From a political point of view, the tale

uncovers a radical element in the public's perception of the existing power structure. Moreover, by insinuating that Admiral Yi's spectacular military accomplishments were the result of his study of Buddhism, the tale is a direct challenge to the inefficacy of the dominant ideology of the time.

The subversive message of Chaun's tale is also evident in its challenging of the traditional gender politics of Confucian Chosŏn society. In the realm of literature, frustration with the male-dominated social order gives rise to a new genre of fiction called "*yosŏng yŏngung sosŏl* (female heroic narratives)." The defining formal property of this genre is the fantastic military leadership of an exceptional woman who, disguised as a man, personally engages in war. Considering that this genre emerged in the 18th century, Bhiksuni Chaun can be viewed as a prototype of a female military hero.

Last, the religious aspect of Chaun's legend suggests that the relationship between nuns and the masses in late Chosŏn might have been closer than what has generally been imagined. Centuries of sustained popularity of Chaun's story can largely be attributed to the extraordinary portrayal of the nun protagonist. As the oral legend has spread in the coastal areas, Bhiksuni Chaun's role as a deliverer seems to have been linked with the cult of Avalokiteshvara, *bodhisattva* of compassion. According to my fieldwork, the legend has been transmitted from the southwest to the southeastern shores and islands, where many shrines dedicated to Avalokiteshvara are located. In light of these geographical factors, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the prevalent feminine imagery of Avalokiteshvara facilitated the public's ready acceptance of the nun as the protector and liberator of the nation. The tale of Chaun thus bolsters a claim that I have made on other occasions that nuns were actively involved in the lives of the lower strata of people in the late Chosŏn era, contrary to the timid and helpless image of them propagated by the Confucian patriarchal system.

NOTES

¹ This oral legend appears to have been written down in the contemporary period, but its collector and the narrator are unknown. The legend was published in 1975. My reference to the content of the legend is largely based on "Master Chaun," Sunch'ŏn Sŭngju hyangt'oji p'yŏnch'anwiwŏnhoi, *Sunch'ŏn Sŭngju hyangt'oji* (Gazetteer of Sunch'ŏn and Sŭngju), Sunch'ŏn: Sunch'ŏnmunhwawŏn, 1975. All the quotes from the tale of Master Chaun are from this edition, and their page numbers are given in parentheses in the main text hereafter.

² Quoted from Chinok, *Hoguk ūi sŏngji Hŭngguksa* (Sacred place for state protection: Hŭngguksa Temple). Yŏsu: Hŭngguksa, 2003, p. 74.

³ Yi Pun, *Haengnok* (Records of actions), vol. 9, Yi Sunsin, *Yi Ch'ungmugongchŏnsŏ* (Collected works of Lord Yi of loyalty and chivalry), Seoul: Kyŏng'inmunhwasa, 1988.

⁴ This record refers to "Sunch'ŏnpu Yŏngch'wisŏn Hŭngguksa Sŏndang Susŭp sangryanggi (Record of the Raising of the Ridge Beam for Renovating the Meditation Hall at Hŭngguksa temple of Yongch'wi Mountain in the Sunch'ŏn District)."

⁵ Puhyu is Sŏsan's dharma brother, affiliated with Hwaŏmsa Temple. Puhyu's disciple Kaksŏng joined the monk army at age 18, along with Chaun.

⁶ These “filed” histories indicate various oral legends on bhiksu Chaun. Most of them are from the southwestern region where Hwaõmsa and Silsangsa are located.

⁷ Undeniably, the tale is fraught with the lore of the mysterious Taoist Immortals. While this lore is important, it is beyond the scope of this article. It will be discussed in a separate paper later.

Noblewomen and Monks: Lay-Monastic Relations in the Early Joseon Dynasty

Soun Sunim

This paper introduces the achievements of Queen Mother Insu (1437–1504), a Buddhist woman who lived during the early period of the Joseon Dynasty. Insu was born as the last daughter of Han Hwak (1403-1456) during the reign of King Sejo (1417–1468). In 1455, when she was 19 years old, she married Prince Dowon, the first son of the Grand Prince Suyang. When King Sejo assumed the throne, Insu became the Crown Princess, known as Subin. Afterwards, she became the Queen Mother of King Seongjong (1457–1495), the ninth king of the Joseon Dynasty.¹

After Buddhism was introduced to the Korean peninsula, the Buddhist scriptures became the only object of intellectual study for scholar-officials and women in the royal and upper-class families.² Insu also pursued the study of Buddhist scriptures. Insu was one of the most knowledgeable women among the royal and aristocratic families, with a particularly good understanding of the Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

Introducing Insu

Insu was a Buddhist follower who lived amidst a whirlpool of increasing suppression of Buddhism during the Joseon Dynasty. She began the journey of a *bodhisattva*, wishing to protect Buddhist monks from Confucian scholars and to lead ignorant humankind into a state of *nirvana* or enlightenment through Buddhism. She hoped to free people from all their sufferings and help them become happy and peaceful. This paper tells the story of Insu and her achievements on her *bodhisattva* journey, as well as the Buddhist monks' responses. It examines the viewpoints of Buddhist monks regarding a woman attaining Buddhahood.

The exact nature of Insu's association with the Buddhist scriptures is not known, but one record states that King Sejo personally participated in the translation of the Korean version of the *Śūrangama Sūtra* with his eldest daughter-in-law, Subin.³ According to the epilogue of the Korean version of the *Śūrangama Sūtra*, in the sixth year of King Sejo's reign, mysterious small crystals appeared among the cremated remains of the Buddha at Hoeamsa, a Buddhist temple not far from today's Seoul. King Sejo ordered the translation of the *Śūrangama Sūtra* upon the request of Grand Prince Hyoryeong.⁴ King Sejo added grammatical notations to the Chinese phrases, Elder Hyegak Sinmi⁵ confirmed the sentences to which the grammatical notations were added, and "Princess Han and so on" corrected the sentences when they were read aloud. Princess Han here refers to Insu. It was not only Insu who participated in the translation of the Buddhist scriptures into Korean. Other women in the royal court, such as a woman named Sanggung Jo, who working in the palace, also made vital contributions and are frequently referenced in the scriptures.⁶ This means that at that time Buddhist women in the royal and upper-class families were highly knowledgeable about the Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

Insu's Achievements as a *Bodhisattva*

Due to her close ties from early on with the project to translate the Buddhist scriptures, Insu's most important achievement was the publication of Buddhist scriptures for the benefit of ordinary people. She devoted all her strength to creating Korean versions of the Buddhist scriptures, including the *dhāranī sūtras* because it was the general population that was hardest hit when they

were not allowed free access to Buddhist temples and when Buddhist ceremonies could not be held. These were the reasons for the promotion of Confucianism and the policy of suppressing Buddhism intensified during the Joseon Dynasty, after the era of King Sejo.

In 1492, the government decided to abolish the licensing of ordination, which would prohibit people from becoming Buddhist monks, and Buddhist monks faced a crisis. It was Insu who flatly opposed this decision. She argued fiercely about this ruling with Confucian scholars and announced the rationale to oppose the abolition three times. To abolish the licensing of ordination by the government was a golden opportunity for Confucian scholars to completely destroy Buddhism. At the time, Insu, who was the most senior married Buddhist at court, had the enormous responsibility of preventing the ruling to abolish government licensing – a prohibition that would have put Buddhist monks in the worst situation ever. Insu’s controversy with the Confucian scholars over the abolition was bound to be fierce. Even though Insu was unable to completely prevent the abolition, despite her best efforts, the fact that a married Buddhist woman confronted officialdom with unremitting determination to protect Buddhist monks is certainly an achievement that will remain forever in the annals of Korean Buddhism.

Insu emphasized that Buddhism is a religion of the people when she stated that one of many reasons for her opposition to the abolition was that “the kings of many generations wanted to eradicate Buddhism, but could not do so because they were worried about stirring up public sentiment.”⁷ Accordingly, Insu accelerated efforts to publish Buddhist scriptures for the people. The Korean version of the *Śūrangama Sūtra*, published in 1460, was the first Buddhist scripture to be published in Hangul, an indigenous, phonetic Korean alphabet. A directorate for the publication of *sūtras* was established, and 33 Buddhist scriptures were published in Chinese characters and nine scriptures were published in Hangul. It appears that Insu continuously participated in the publication of Buddhist scriptures.⁸ In 1472, when she was 36 years old, a total of 29 of Buddhist scriptures were published, including the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Śūrangama Sūtra*, and the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*.⁹ In 1485, Insu facilitated the publication of the *Collection of Five Great Dhāranīs*. Insu’s project to translate Buddhist texts had a major impact on the people’s understanding of Buddhism, especially the *Collection of Five Great Dhāranīs*, which was among the key texts that caused people to generate faith in Avalokiteśvara’s power to relieve suffering. This text became the nucleus of the *Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara Sūtra* that Korean Buddhists chant every day.

Insu’s Journey as a *Bodhisattva* and as a Woman Attaining Buddhahood

Not only the women of the royal court, but also the officials and Buddhist monks who revered Buddhism participated in the project to translate the Buddhist scriptures. These monks and officials praised Insu’s spirit in publishing Buddhist scriptures as part of her journey to becoming a *bodhisattva*. A discussion of Insu’s journey as a *bodhisattva* appears in the epilogues to texts written by Kim Su-on (1410–1481) and Bhikkhu Hakjo (1432–1513). These epilogues reveal the reasons for and meaning behind the publication of particular Buddhist scriptures. Kim Su-on wrote an epilogue to the *Chronicle of the Buddhas and Patriarchs*, which was published by Insu in 1472. Kim, who revered Buddhism, lived during the Joseon Dynasty, which had a policy of suppressing Buddhism. He was the brother of Bhikkhu Sinmi (1403–1480), who had a high position in the royal court. In his epilogue, Kim Su-on refers to Insu’s *bodhisattva* spirit as follows:

Her Royal Highness Insu displays her generous mind and establishes the four great vows of

bodhisattvahood, saying that the Buddha's teachings consist of three things, but there are no differences among them, so the Buddha and all humankind have equally mysterious natures. Humankind, however, fell into the eternal cycle of the six ways amid their delusion and addiction. Enlightenment and foolishness are not very far from each other, as the latter is nothing but the failure to see and hear the truth, and seeing and hearing the truth is the state of enlightenment. Thus, if the Mahayana sutras are disseminated throughout the world and all people hear Buddha's teachings, plant the seeds of enlightenment, and attain enlightenment, it is the return of Buddha's favor.¹⁰

Kim Su-on compared Insu's aspiration – to support Buddhist temples in publishing Buddhist scriptures, so that humankind would be able to hear the Mahāyāna *sūtras* – to the four great vows of a *bodhisattva*:

- (1) However innumerable sentient beings may be, I vow to save them all;
- (2) However inexhaustible the afflictions (kleśa) may be, I vow to eradicate them all;
- (3) However immeasurable the teachings may be, I vow to study them all;
- (4) However unsurpassed the path to Buddhahood may be, I vow to attain it.¹¹

The four great vows express the wish of the greatly merciful and compassionate *bodhisattvas* to reach enlightenment together with all humankind.

Bhikkhu Hakjo, who wrote epilogues to the *Sūtra of Buddha Peak and Heart Dhāranī* (1485), the *Collection of Five Great Dhāranīs*, and other texts, also mentioned Insu's *bodhisattva*-like qualities.¹² Bhikkhu Hakjo was born into the Gyeongbuk Andong Kim family as the son of Kim Gye-gwon in 1432. The Kim family was made up of scholar-officials, most of whom entered politics early in the Joseon Dynasty. Bhikkhu Hakjo was a favorite of King Seongjong and received preferential treatment in the royal court, because he was a Buddhist monk from a family of scholar-officials. In his epilogue to the *Collection of Five Great Dhāranīs*, he revealed that Insu wished to relieve the people's suffering by writing her proposal in Hangul, as follows:

Her Highness Insu deplored the shallowness of worldly values and the urgency of the times and thought that only the *Collection of Five Great Dhāranīs* could benefit people in such an era. She thought that it would benefit people most in a world that was coming to an end, because chanting it aloud, even just one time, would bring as much good fortune and virtue as reciting the entire Buddhist canon, without having to concentrate on one's own mind or having to look deeply into the meanings of the Buddhist scriptures. The Sanskrit and Chinese characters of the Buddhist scriptures are difficult and abstruse, however, and worrisome for those who recite them. Thus, Insu rescued the Tang version and added a Korean annotation to it, then republished and distributed it widely as an offering to the temple. As the people could easily chant it aloud, this removed the distinction between the wise and the foolish, and as it could be easily carried, this removed the distinction between the rich and the poor.¹³

According to Bhikkhu Hakjo, Insu translated the *dhāranī sūtras* into Korean alphabet to rescue people in an age when the Buddhadharma was declining. She wished that everyone, regardless of whether they were rich or poor or whether they held high or low status in society, would recite the

scriptures and immediately be freed from suffering. Bhikkhu Hakjo reveals that Insu led the publication of the Buddhist scriptures with the spirit of a *bodhisattva* only to rescue people from suffering. Thus, it can be seen that both Kim Su-on and Bhikkhu Hakjo had high praise for Insu's journey on the *bodhisattva* path.

At this point, a question arises: What is the correlation between Insu as a person of great mercy and compassion who wished to rescue people as part of her *bodhisattva* journey and Insu as a woman attaining Buddhahood? When Kim Su-on and Bhikkhu Hakjo mentioned her aspiration in their epilogues, did they believe that Insu was capable of attaining Buddhahood? Or did they believe that she was incapable of Buddhahood because she was a woman, even though she was traveling the *bodhisattva* path? Modern Korean Buddhists insist on the five special hindrances for woman and assert that a woman cannot attain Buddhahood, despite the important roles that Buddhist women play. The five special hindrances maintain that a woman cannot attain the status of a god in the heaven of Brahmā, a god in the heaven of Indra, a Mara king, a Wheel-turning King, or a Buddha. Did these the five special hindrances for woman apply to Insu as well?

Some clues related to this question appear in an apocryphal Buddhist scripture that was compiled in Goryeo in 1298:

Master Lakseo said, "A *sūtra* mentions the five special hindrances for woman. First, a woman cannot attain Buddhahood, and from this viewpoint, a woman's unfortunate karmic retribution is lamentable. However, the *Sūtra of Moon-visible Woman* also tells the story of Vimalakīrti's wife, who was named Undefined and gave birth to a baby girl who was decent in appearance and whose clothes emitted a mysterious light. The baby's clothes were decorated with mysterious treasures and shone brighter than moonlight. Thus, her parents named her Moon-visible Woman. From this story, it can be seen that it is not always difficult for a woman to attain Buddhahood, even though being born as a woman is considered the result of karmic retribution.¹⁴

In this quotation, the possibility of a woman attaining Buddhahood is not completely denied. The apocryphal Buddhist scripture is called the *Sūtra of the Practice of the Western Paradise Conducted in the Present*, compiled by the Goryeo Buddhist monks Woncham and Lakseo at Gejosa Temple on Gong Mountain. Even though it was compiled during the Goryeo era, it was published six times in the Joseon Dynasty, up until 1900, which shows that it was a popular Buddhist scripture during the entire Joseon Dynasty.

Apocryphal Buddhist texts, unlike Buddhist *sūtras* in the Tripitaka, reflect the demands and realities of the times. Accordingly, the contents of apocryphal Buddhist texts clearly reveal the social atmosphere and people thinking at the time when they were compiled. Master Lakseo, quoted above, indicates that at least some people in Goryeo society were questioning the five special hindrances. When the quotation is read with the characteristics of apocryphal Buddhist texts in mind, it appears to show that not all Buddhist monks at the time fully accepted the five special hindrances for woman, especially regarding the attainment of Buddhahood. This may indicate that the Buddhist monks at that time did not always discriminate between male and female in assessing the issue of whether woman can attain Buddhahood. Accordingly, it is likely that, in dealing with the possibility of a woman attaining Buddhahood, Buddhist monks at the end of the Goryeo Dynasty and during the early part of the Joseon Dynasty were more concerned with distinguishing the spiritual status of a practitioner, whether high, middle, or low, than with the practitioner's gender.

NOTES

¹ Lee Gyeong-ha, *Insu: The Greatest Woman Intellectual of the 15th Century: A Study on Korean Classical Female Literature*, 12, Korean Classical Female Literature Society, 2006, p. 172.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 165–66.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁵ Jo Yoon-ho, *Joseon Biography: The Kim Su-on Family's Buddhist Faith*, doctoral thesis, Korea National University of Education, 2004, pp. 34–50.

⁶ Lee, *Insu*, p. 171.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹¹ This formulation of the vows is attributed to the Chinese scholar monk Tiantai Zhiyi (538–597) and appears in his classic text *Mohe Zhiguan* (The Great Calming and Contemplation). Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 818.

¹² Park Do-Wha, “Woodblock Prints of the Late 15th Century Sponsored by the Royal Family,” *Lecture History of Art* 19(2002) 161, FN 14.

¹³ Cheon Hye-bong, “Joseon Biography: The Buddhist Scriptures Woodblock-printed Book,” *Korea Bibliography Research: Collection in Commemoration of the Retirement of Professor Gosan Cheon Hye-bong* (Seoul: Samsung Publishing Co., Ltd., 1991), p. 702, FN 22; and Kim Moo-bong, “A Study on Yeongheomyeokchoeonhae,” *Korea Language and Literature Research* 57(2011) 46.

¹⁴ Chae Yensu (trans.), *The Hyeonhaeng Seobang Gyeong* (Seoul: Chorong, 1988), pp. 118–20.

Bridging the Lay-Monastic Divide: Women's Religious Leadership in Tibetan Narratives

Pema Khandro

Appreciating the history of Tibetan Buddhist women's religious leadership requires an expanded paradigm beyond the lay-monastic divide that is generally applied to understanding Buddhist communities. This binary category of demarking religious activity obscures the variety of roles of religious leadership in Tibet in which women were active participants. Biographical narratives name historical female figures in numerous types of religious occupations. Their stories as treasure revealers, nuns, yoginis, non-celibate teachers, incarnations (Tibetan: *sprul sku*; *sprul ba*), oracles and patrons, doctor-healers, mothers, and consorts reflect diverse female influences on Tibetan religious life.

Although there is a paucity of detailed biographical narratives about major female figures in Tibetan history, the narrative materials in compilations of Tibetan life stories reflect cultural frameworks and literary tropes that describe and proscribe a variety of women's religious roles. Understanding these roles requires reconceiving the assumption that Buddhist leadership falls into one of two categories, lay or monastic. One example of the scope of religious leadership represented in the texts is the reference to vow-carrying non-celibate practitioners known as *ngags ma*, *ras ma*, and *rnal 'byor mas*. Religious roles have also included those typically filled by women, such as oracles that return from death ('*das log ma*) and roles played by women as an integral part of the ideology related to Tibetan treasure revelation. These non-celibate religious leaders may have also participated in smaller local traditions outside institutional settings, yet were religious specialists, leaders, and retrospectively regarded as lineage holders. Such figures in Tibetan religions are neither lay nor monastic; to describe them as such is misleading, since the term "lay" refers to non-religious specialists or non-professional participants. Thus, the lay-monastic framework omits a significant segment of the clerical population and, along with it, some of the roles women played in Tibetan Buddhist traditional histories.

This paper suggests an expanded paradigm for conceiving of women's religious roles in Tibet. It uses a methodology of analyzing these roles from the bird's eye view of hagiographical collections, instead of merely looking at individual life stories. Such a view allows a glimpse of a collective effort to construct a memory of female religious roles. The study draws on three compilations of Tibetan life stories as part of a larger work in progress. The first is based on data from the only known collection of Tibetan hagiographies devoted exclusively to Tibetan Buddhist women, *The Garland of White Lotuses: Great Female Lives in Tibet*,¹ which features 90 narratives and 57 female figures. The data from this collection is contrasted with two other compilations of lineage histories in the form of biographical narratives (*lo gyus*, *thob yig*, *rnam thar*, and more) in Dudjom Rinpoche's *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* and Nyoshul Khenpo's *Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*. By dealing with compilations of narratives, this study seeks to ask what expanded frameworks for conceiving of women's religious roles may be possible. Such an effort can contribute to the need to record, account for, and begin to re-conceive the roles of women in Tibet's history. It also offers possibilities for making visible the greater variety of possibilities for religious leadership for men and women represented in Tibetan biographical accounts.

Understanding women's roles in Tibetan religion depends upon an appreciation of the diversity of Tibetan religious forms. Tibetan religious activity not only included monastic life, but

also included other forms of religious activity that took place in lineages, families, communities, hermitages, religious movements, and local rituals led by non-celibate religious specialists.² For this reason, looking back at Tibetan history within the framework of “lay/monastic” clerical roles obscures significant elements of Tibetan religious activity from view. In the case of female religious activity in Tibet, an inclusive framework is even more crucial. A framework that includes non-celibate religious professionals and religious leaders can provide a lens through which to uncover the contributions of women that have been previously been hidden from historian’s view.

The Limits of the Lay/monastic Framework

The lay/monastic framework is problematic for describing Tibetan religious activity for three reasons. First, this usage of the term “lay” is a mistranslation used to identify a variety of religious professionals. Second, the absolute divide between lay and monastic does not always apply to major figures in Tibet’s religious history. Finally, this binary framework omits major clerical roles, central to Tibetan religious life, that fall outside this typography, particularly the array of female religious leaders who operated outside the corridors of monastic power structures.

The term “lay” is problematic for describing Tibetan Buddhist religious leadership, due to its ambiguous application to both highly trained religious specialists and non-clerical members of Tibetan Buddhist communities. This ambiguity is generated when the term “lay” practitioner is used by scholars to refer to clerical figures who are non-celibate adherents of Buddhist tantric lineages. These non-celibate practitioners are known by various terms, such as mantrins, (*ngags pa*), cotton clad yogis, (*ras pa*), yogis (*rnal 'byor pa*), and meditators or hermits (*sgom chen*). The tradition’s narratives portray such non-celibate religious leaders as occupying diverse roles in Tibetan religious life. Some were religious leaders of smaller local traditions outside institutional settings. Some were treasure revealers and, as such, were pivotal figures and founders of major lineages. Some were also high-ranking *lamas* or heads of lineages. Yet, despite their non-celibate and non-monastic status, they were all undoubtedly religious specialists. Therefore, as Van Schaik points out,³ many major Tibetan religious leaders could not effectively be named as monastics nor could they accurately be identified by the English term “lay.” “Lay” indicates non-professional participants who are not of the clergy.⁴ A modern day example of a non-lay, non-monastic religious figure is Chatral Rinpoche (*bya bral sangs rgyas rdorje*) a renowned and influential modern-day high-ranking rNyingmapa lineage holder who is a mantrin and yogi (*ngags pa*) who wears the long hair and white robes of the Buddhist tantrics. Another example is Marpa, the 11th-century teacher who is identified as a “layman” in the *The Life of Milarepa*.⁵ Yet Marpa is credited with bringing a lineage of teachings and practices from India to Tibet (known as Kagyu and Mahamudra) and the narrative of his life revolves around his role as a religious translator, teacher, and tantric specialist. Moreover, he is depicted repeatedly in traditional artwork in the robes of a tantric priest. So Marpa could not be said to be “not of the clergy” either. Dudjom Rinpoche’s *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, in the section of biographies, in the treasure revelation lineages, depicts 27 major *lamas* of the lineage. Of these, 16 are not monks, yet they are highly trained religious specialists. Yet another example is Sera Khandro (*se ra mkha' 'gro bde ba'i rdo rje*), whose biography has recently been studied by Jacoby.⁶ This autobiographical account describes the life of a treasure revealer and religious teacher who deliberately chose to occupy a role as a non-celibate religious adherent and who eventually assumed

the role of a teacher and treasure revealer. Likewise, such a figure could not be termed “lay,” because she devotes her life to religious practice, study, and teaching, and is the leader of religious community; she therefore cannot be called a “non-professional” either. These are just a few examples to demonstrate how the term “lay” practitioner renders a Tibetan clerical population invisible, confusing them with untrained religious adherents who did not play roles of religious leadership.

Monastic institutions were not the only focal point of religious training in Tibet. In particular, the rNyingmapa sect of Buddhist tantric communities did not develop monastic institutions as the locus of their activities until the 18th century.⁷ Thus, the lay/monastic framework foregrounds the monastic institution as the dominant reference point in a religious life in a way that was not the case for all groups, in all places, at all times.

Since communities of non-celibate religious figures entertained a view that was more hospitable to women’s participation, the lay/monastic paradigm may be even more limited when attempting to generate a typography of female religious roles, for example, among Tibetan treasure revealers.⁸ Therefore, the framework of monastic versus lay populations makes cultural traditions that were more inclusive of female figures less visible.

Besides these limitations of the monastic/lay framework, a second issue is significant in considering the history of women’s religious leadership in Tibet. The binary framework of monastic versus lay creates an absolute divide that was not always delineated in such definite terms, thus obscuring the diversity of clerical roles that Tibetan cultural and religious structures entertained. For example, in her study of the life of the Tibetan female hierarch Mingyur Peldron, (*mi ’gyur dpal sgron*) Melnick notes that both Peldron and her teacher, Terdak Lingpa, assumed roles that can be described both as monastic and non-celibate in formats typical for the lineage.⁹ Although the concept of “nun” is used to describe Peldron, Peldron is also depicted with the long hair and non-monastic dress of Tibetan mantrins and yoginis – the non-monastic clergy. In the case of Chökyi Drönma (*Chos kyi sgron ma*), her biography names her as both an ordained nun, (*dge slong ma*), and then later as wearing the long hair of a *yogini*, and suggests that she acted as a tantric consort.¹⁰ Though the historicity of all these details is not always definitive, narratives make clear that Tibetan religious leaders may be depicted as nuns at one point in their life and later as non-celibate tantrics in another scene in their lives, making classification of them as either monastic or lay incomplete. This also reflects a pattern in which the traditions own narratives do not take the monastic/lay framework as the definitive categorization for its male or female clerics, particularly in Vajrayana-focused sects that were more inclusive of females. Scholarly attempts to address the issue of the absence of a lineage of fully ordained female monastics in Tibet have highlighted the way in which the use of the term “nun” is used in diverse and ambiguous formats for female figures in Tibetan religious narratives.

Female Religious Leaders in Collections of Tibetan Narratives

In the case of female figures, the monastic/lay framework is even more misleading. It is a framework that favors monastic institutions as the primary reference point for understanding historical figures, when women have historically not been the privileged participants of Tibet’s major monastic institutions. When female monastic institutions have been established, it has been without the prestige of full ordination and without the cultural and financial support that the male monastic

institutions were afforded.¹¹ However, in religious narratives, women were remembered as religious leaders who practiced outside these institutions, as is identified below. Yet, if the monastic/lay framework is not a useful one, is there another model that would be more appropriate? Collections of Tibetan life stories offer the tradition's own typographies of religious leadership. In fact, biographical collections offer something that individual life stories do not. The stories, presented together, communicate patterns of religious identity and a broad spectrum of religious roles played by female leaders.

Tibetan literature's genre of biographical collections serves a number of purposes: it preserves historical accounts, establish lines of lineal authority, present doctrinal assertions, and identify religious ideals through the characters featured in them. For example, Dudjom Rinpoche's *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* is a collection of biographies divided in three primary ways: according to temporal sequence; according to whether the figure was a member of the lineages of "transmitted precepts," the oral lineage; and whether the figure was treasure revealer. The monastic/non-monastic identity is not the primary organizing factor in categorizing these figures in literature. Perhaps this is in part because the lines between monastic and lay are not always clear from the biographies themselves; the celibate or non-celibate status of the figure represented appears to be less primary than the figures's temporal position and role in the lineage as a carrier of oral lineages or treasure lineages. Likewise, in a similar work, Nyoshul Khenpo's *Marvellous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage*, the biographies are organized according to major lineage figures and their students, including monastics, non-monastics, and those whose celibate or non-celibate status is at times unidentifiable.¹²

Until recently, Tibetan biographical collections, such as the works cited above, were limited to male figures. However, in 2013 a 15-volume collection was published in Lhasa by Tibetan Ancient Books Publishing House of Tibet¹³ featuring female figures exclusively. This text is titled the *Garland of White Lotus: The Liberation Stories of Great Female Lives in Tibet*.¹⁴ This biographical collection is unique because its first organizing principle is gender; the collection features only female subjects. The second organizing principle is the country of origin, with female figures in India presented first and female figures in Tibet presented second. Beyond these broad categories, a wide range of figures appear; female Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, spirits, and historical figures are featured in a diverse variety of roles.¹⁵ I have grouped these figures according to four major categories.

1. Dynastic Leaders.¹⁶ This category includes female figures such as *tulkus* (*sprul sku*) and *trulbas* (*sprul ba*). These subjects are identified as the incarnation of a female divine figure, a previous female practitioner, or the progenitor of a female religious dynasty in which subsequent figures are identified as incarnations of this predecessor. Such is the case of Chönyi Zangmo (*Chos nyid bzang mo*), who is identified as the emanation of the 14th-century Longchen Rabjampa (*kLong chen rab 'byams pa*), a male religious master who lived six centuries before her. It also includes figures such as Mingyur Peldron, who became a leader of the major lineage and institution held by her father. This category also includes treasure revealers who were retroactively recognized as major lineage figures; for example, the previously mentioned Jomo Menmo or the recently studied Sera Khandro.

2. Nuns: This category includes the narratives of ordained women. For example, it records the legend of the first fully ordained nun in Tibet, Jetsunma Kōnchok Tsomo (*rje btsun ma dkon mchog gtso mo*), and other subjects who were identified by their monastic status.

3. Yoginis: The category includes figures who are identified by one of five titles that generally denote contemplative practices in Buddhist *tantra*. First, the title “yogini” (*rnal 'byor ma*) is used in the case of six subjects. Second are practitioners of internal yoga practices, such as “*res ma*,” such as Drinjan Rema (*drin can ras ma*), and funerary ritual specialists (*gcod pas*). Third are female tantrikas, *yoginis*, and tantric practitioner (*ngags ma*). Fourth are women who are identified as consorts of male Buddhist *lamas*. In other collections, the names of many such women and their biographies have not been recorded, though traces of their existence are noted in collections of male biographies, such as *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History*. However, some of these consorts also became the central character of their own biography, such as Mandarava (*Za hor rgyal po'i sras mo lha lcam mandha ra va'i rnam thar pa gu ru padma'i zhal lung rin chen phreng ba*) and Yeshe Tsogyal (*mkha' 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal gyi skyes rabs rnam thar rgyas pa*). Fifth are female figures designated as *mahāsiddhas*, or religious practitioners renowned for their significant spiritual accomplishments; for example, Drubchen Orgyan Butri (*sgrub chen o rgyan bu khrid*).

4. Oracles. This category includes women known as *delog* (*'das log ma*) who returned from death to provide doctrinal insights and prophecies for the living. This is a religious role particularly associated with women.

Beyond foregrounding particular types of religious figures, the monastic/lay divide functions as a concise designator for identifying categories of religious activity. However, the terms are misleading, because they do not encapsulate the full range of Tibetan religious roles. What other framework might be used to concisely identify women in Tibetan religious history? The four-fold model that I have created above is a beginning; however, it is also incomplete. Because it is drawn from hagiographical literature, it omits at least two other major roles where women were influential: as mothers and as patrons. Future research projects may reveal more information about women in these roles who appear in the biographies of male religious leaders. Still, neither a four-fold model nor a six-fold model is as concise a designation as the lay/monastic typology. Therefore, this paper suggests that a broader, more inclusive framework be utilized in order to begin drawing attention to the involvement of diverse types of female religious figures in Tibet. Perhaps an inclusive referent such as “female Buddhist leaders” could be used to include a wider variety of religious leadership while still serving as a concise designation. Drawing any conclusion about a more inclusive term for discussing female religious roles from all Buddhist countries is beyond the scope of this paper, but there is clearly more dialogue is needed to develop more accurate and inclusive language to render female leaders in Tibetan religious history more visible and identifiable.

NOTES

¹ *Phags bod kyi skyes chen ma dag gi rnam par thar ba pad ma dkar po'i phreng ba.*

² International Association for Tibetan Studies, *Buddhism Beyond the Monastery: Tantric Practices and Their Performers in Tibet and the Himalayas* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 1.

³ Sam Van Schaik, *Approaching the Great Perfection: Simultaneous and Gradual Approaches to Dzogchen Practice in Jigme Lingpa's Longchen Nyingtig* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

⁴ “Layman, n.1,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, accessed May 1, 2015.

⁵ Heruka (trans. Lobsang P. Lhalungpa), *The Life of Milarepa: A New Translation from the Tibetan* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁶ Sarah H. Jacoby, *Love and Liberation: Autobiographical Writings of the Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Sera Khandro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

⁷ Georges Dreyfus, “Where do Commentarial Schools Come From? Reflections on the History of Tibetan Scholasticism,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28:2(2006) 273-97.

⁸ Such was the case for 13th-century female treasure revealer Jomo Menmo. Her role as the consort of Guru Chowang is what allowed him to decode his treasure revelations and unlock internal blocks. Dudjom Rinpoche and Gyurme Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History* (Boston: Wisdom Publications; 1991).

⁹ Melnick, Alison, “The Life and Times of Mingyur Peldron: Female Leadership in 18th Century Tibetan Buddhism,” dissertation, University of Virginia, 2014, p. 138.

¹⁰ Hildegard Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Salgado, Nirmala S. *Buddhist Nuns and Gendered Practice: In Search of the Female Renunciant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé and Sogyal Rinpoche (trans. Richard Barron), *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems: Biographies of Masters of Awareness in the Dzogchen Lineage* (Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, 2005).

¹³ *Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang.*

¹⁴ *'Phags bod kyi skyes chen ma dag gi rnam par thar ba pad+ma dkar po'i phreng ba. Bod ljongs bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang* 1:1(2013) 1–114.

¹⁵ Kali Cape and Liang Jue, “Women in Tibetan Religious Memory,” Unpublished paper presented at the Southeast Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

¹⁶ This use of the term “dynasty” follows Diemberger and Reugg’s use of the term to refer to religious heads, abbots, and spiritual masters who are invested with considerable authority in hierocratic lines. See Diemberger, 327, note 1. Kinney also points out the efficacy of the term “dynasty” in her work on Chinese female biographies and offers a non-gendered term to address transmission and perpetuation of power structures. This explanation is noteworthy enough to include in full: “Dynastics is also distinct from patriarchy, which can be defined as a system of authority that is gendered male. In contrast to the gender-based notion of patriarchy, dynastics focuses on the transmission and perpetuation of a specific power structure. Dynastics is thus more concerned with maintaining continuity than with shoring up masculine power. Because patriarchy often monopolizes power, the two converge on a regular basis. Dynastics, however, is concerned with perpetuating and rationalizing hegemony that is already entrenched. It is a verbal and behavioral mechanism for perpetuating power, whether it is masculine or not. We therefore see in the narratives of the *Lienü zhuan* and elsewhere in early Chinese literature not just women subordinating themselves to men but also husbands, sons, and brothers who are directed to defer to women as a means to sustain dynastic power or family prestige.” Anne Behnke Kinney, *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü zhuan of Liu Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 61.

The Invisible Majority: Conversations with Young Adult Asian American Buddhists

Chenxing Han

During my undergraduate years, I visited various Buddhist communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. At meditation centers where older Caucasian practitioners predominated, I was surprised when people complimented my English (“I can’t detect any accent!”) and kept asking me “Where are you *really* from,” expecting me to say an Asian country, although I have lived in America most of my life. In addition, many people expected to find that my parents were Buddhist, although they are atheist, like many Chinese who lived through the Cultural Revolution.

My Bay Area explorations also took me to Cambodian, Chinese, and Vietnamese Buddhist temples. Here, nobody complimented my English, probably because many of them had children my age who spoke English fluently like I did. Yet it seemed that I rarely saw anyone older than 5 or younger than 50 at these temples. I began to wonder: Where were all the other young adult Asian American Buddhists?

A 2012 Pew Forum survey found that of the 1.0–1.3 percent of the U.S. adult population who identify as Buddhist, 67 to 69 percent are Asian American.¹ Despite comprising more than two-thirds of American Buddhists, Asian American Buddhists remain underrepresented in both popular and academic literature. Asian American Buddhists are typically situated within a “two Buddhisms” typology that distinguishes between convert, white, middle-class, Western Buddhists and their non-convert, Asian, immigrant, ethnic Buddhist counterparts. This dichotomous representation contributes to the stereotype that all Asian American Buddhists live in “ethnic enclaves,” do not speak English, and are “superstitious” rather than “rational.” Unfortunately, this characterization does not capture the diverse reality of Asian American Buddhists, especially the experience of young adults.

This paper is a portion of a much larger research project. For my master’s thesis, I conducted in-person, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with 26 young adult Asian American Buddhists about their Buddhist practices, communities, and beliefs; perceptions of Buddhism in America; and opinions about the representation of Asian American Buddhists. The interviews ranged from 1.5 to more than five hours, with an average length of approximately 2.5 hours. I conducted 22 interviews in the San Francisco Bay Area and four interviews in Southern California.

There are various competing definitions of “young adult,” “Asian American” and “Buddhist,” so it is not surprising that combining all three can cause some confusion. Wanting to create inclusive categories, I sought to interview people between the ages of 18 to 39 who were (1) of Asian heritage; (2) engaged in Buddhist practice, broadly defined; and (3) willing to complete an interview in English. I was open to interviewing people of full or partial Asian heritage, regardless of immigration/citizenship status. I also did not require participants to be native English speakers. Nor was self-identifying as a Buddhist a prerequisite – indeed, I was interested in the reasons why those engaged in Buddhist practices might choose to not call themselves Buddhist.

The 26 people I interviewed ranged in age from 19 to 41; most were in their 20s and 30s, with an average age of 28. The group included 14 men and 12 women. Only three of the participants (two women and one man) were married, and none had children. Three of the interviewees were undergraduate students, while the remainder were working or pursuing post-undergraduate education.

In addition to representing a range of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, interviewees also came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Many ethnicities are missing – Burmese, Korean, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Tibetan, to name a few – but the group is nonetheless quite diverse. A plurality (nine) of interviewees are ethnically Chinese, four are of Japanese ancestry, and four identify as Vietnamese. Three people are of mixed heritage and the others trace their ancestry to Southeast Asia, South Asia, or Central or West Asia.

Why is American Buddhism so White?

I was astounded by the diverse backgrounds of my interviewees, and puzzled why I did not see their faces or hear their voices when reading about American Buddhism. To understand interviewees' perspectives about the invisibility of Asian American Buddhists, I asked for their thoughts and feelings about two viewpoints. The first viewpoint addressed the question “Why is American Buddhism so white?”

An August 2012 blog post on Angry Asian Buddhist has the title, “Why is the Under 35 Project So White?” The Angry Asian Buddhist writes: “This year Shambhala SunSpace has been posting weekly essays from the Under 35 Project, a laudable initiative to support and highlight the voices of the emerging generation of Buddhists and meditators. As usual, my naïveté never fails to let me down and I was once again shocked at the whiteness of the lineup. Not a single East or Southeast Asian among them.”²

This blog post excerpt and the accompanying photo collage showing 19 Caucasian contributors and one South Asian, elicited polarized responses. At one extreme was a counteraccusation aimed at the Angry Asian Buddhist: “I don't think it's appropriate for him to be upset about it; whether you understand Buddhism or not shouldn't be an ethnic thing.” This person, a Japanese American Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, saw the opposite problem at Jodo Shinshu temples, where Caucasians have felt discriminated against in a majority Japanese American context.

At the other extreme, a respondent was shocked and dismayed: “I think if they're going to do something like this, they should invite people and not just take the people who are comfortable with always saying what their opinion is without being asked – because then white privilege comes into play... I mean you should care to be diverse. It should creep them out to put up a picture like this themselves, right? Damn! That's just crazy.”

Some interviewees tried to rationalize the low representation of Asian Americans in the collage. Several people surmised that white convert Buddhists might be more vocal than Asian American Buddhists, who might not see the need to speak out. Other respondents thought the magazine was simply appealing to its largely-white readership.

Michael, an interviewee who had worked for a Buddhist publishing company, took a proactive approach in his response:

What if Asian Americans came up with their own magazine? Or came out with their own form of Buddhist media? ... In communities in Taiwan and China, if non-Asians contributed to local Buddhist media, they're very welcoming of it. I guess because I'm accustomed to

that, when I see this, I have to think the other way around now! I have to think that we Asians are becoming the outlier now.

I'm not surprised that there are these kind of statistics. I'm very glad that at least the Angry Asian Buddhist is bringing it up. At least now that it's in the air, people are seeing it now. But I think the best way to address it is: let's have our own. *Let's have our own*. And then we would be more than welcome to invite Caucasian contributors to contribute over to us. Or somehow work out a collaboration with them... The Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, they have a magazine called *Eastern Horizon*. Their contributors are actually pretty close to diverse: some are Caucasian, some are Asian.

Why are Asian American Buddhists So Invisible?

The spectrum of responses to this viewpoint showed how young adult Asian American Buddhists grapple with being both racial and religious minorities in the U.S. The second viewpoint I presented brought forth a number of creative responses to this experience of being “[d]oubly marginalized by virtue of race and religion”:³

Finally, in a podcast called the Secular Buddhist, a scholar of Buddhism in America says: “One of the blogs we’re all familiar with is the one called Angry Asian Buddhist, and it seems that he only posts issues that refer to how much he seems to hate white Buddhists. And he never really gets out there and does something to counteract that... maybe the question isn’t, why is American Buddhism so white, but why are Asian American Buddhists so invisible.”⁴

This complex quote sparked lively discussion about its three main claims: (1) the Angry Asian Buddhist hates white Buddhists; (2) he hasn’t done anything “to counteract that”; and (3) Asian American Buddhists are invisible. Only three interviewees correctly identified the speaker as Charles Prebish. Adam, who is half-Filipino, could sympathize with both sides of the debate:

Good old Chuck, man. I love the guy; I know him well. We talk on the phone, and I think he’s got some valid concerns with some of what the Angry Asian Buddhist blog does. We’ll use the Buddhist teachings: Hatred is never overcome by hatred. Hatred is only overcome by love. This is an eternal law in Buddhism...

No problem is black and white. Converts are probably just as responsible for not including the Asian communities as Asian communities are for only serving their own communities. It’s not a simple issue...

There’s a lot to comment on. That he seems to hate white Buddhists. I don’t necessarily think that. That he gets out there to do something to counteract that. Well, the blog is something to counteract that, number one. Yeah, I guess he could be starting some intercultural faith dialogue; that would probably do more to serve.

I have a problem with this discussion taking place on the blogosphere, because human beings need to be with each other, to interact with each other. And that breaks down intellectual conceptual ideas and stereotypes. On the internet, all you have is intellectual conceptual ideas so all it does is reify and encourage relationships based on concrete ideas about who they are, who we are, and there's no heart, and there's no love.

Several people shared Adam's concern about the limitations of speaking out with anger and hatred. The Angry Asian Buddhist is well aware of the reactions the blog title generates. "Anger is not a Buddhist virtue. More often than not, you'll hear Buddhists describe it as a mental defilement – and much worse,"⁵ he writes on the "About" page of the blog. Several interviewees appreciate the element of humor and satire in the title of the blog and recognize the cultural reference to the Angry Asian Man. "The blog is a funny contradiction," noted Sara, a Vietnamese American whose parents are Buddhist. The title might even be thought of as a skillful means to garner attention and promote dialogue."

Whether or not interviewees agreed with the Angry Asian Buddhist's perspective, it is clear that the blog provides a launching point for further conversation. Sara responded with enthusiasm:

I need to look up this blog! There's Angry Asian Man, but I didn't know there was Angry Asian Buddhist. This is the voice that I have been talking about that I'd been missing. I haven't heard from anyone else in this community that I somewhat identify with. I haven't heard anyone else saying anything of any opinion about how they feel about how they are represented. So this is my first time hearing that. And it's kind of confirmed what I have been speculating but not sure of, which is, again, the face of Buddhism in America is largely white.

However, as Adam points out, it is not easy to assign responsibility or blame for this largely white representation. Some put the fault on Asian Americans: parents do not force their children to learn about Buddhism; Buddhist practice becomes diluted through assimilation; Asian American Buddhists lack strong leadership. By contrast, Marcus, a Taiwanese American college student and activist, put the onus on white Buddhists instead. He saw the question "Why are Asian Americans so invisible?" as an indication of Prebish's white privilege, a privilege that enabled the scholar to ignore power structures that perpetuate the status quo of Asian American invisibility. During our interview, Marcus made a connection between a Buddhist principle and his work with the LGBT community:

A bodhisattva is an ally! A bodhisattva is someone who forsakes her enlightenment for those who cannot yet attain it. An ally recognizes and forsakes his privilege for those who do not yet share it. Prebish could be an ally: he's starting to ask the right questions. It's his responsibility to take that white space, that space where white people get to talk about Buddhism, and turn it into an ally space. Don't question why Asian American Buddhists are invisible. They are invisible because you're not looking for them!

In response to the question "Why are Asian American Buddhists so invisible," the young adults I

interviewed articulated multiple visions for creating spaces where Asian American Buddhists are *not* invisible. Overall, they resisted taking sides in the rancorous debate Prebish lays out. They chose creativity over complaining, putting forth questions and visions of their own:

Are Asian American Buddhists invisible because they choose to be invisible, or because no one chooses to recognize them?

Why aren't their voices being heard? Buddhist publications have moral and ethical guidelines – shouldn't they include everyone's voices?

Asians American Buddhists are everywhere. The media only notices what is different, what is novel. People choose not to talk about them; they are not a trending topic.

It's an enigma, the way a lot of people associate Buddhism with Asia, but then Buddhist magazines in America show pictures only of white Buddhists.

Growing up, I experienced hardships being who I am, discrimination as an Asian American Buddhist. So I want to see if I can change that for other people in the future.

Don't go around looking for an Asian American Buddhist space. Build it yourself.

Together, the young adult Asian American Buddhists I interviewed explored the contours of the enigma of what Jane Iwamura calls an "Asian religion without Asians."⁶ Buddhism in America, romanticized and valorized for its ancient Asian roots, no longer belongs to Asians. Asian American Buddhists are exempted from representations of Buddhism in America; at most, they are representatives of an anachronistic form of the religion.

The young adult Asian American Buddhists interviewed for this project recognize the harm in erasing Asian American Buddhists from representations of Buddhism in America. Whether Buddhism is the religion of their family of origin, or a religion they have sought out for themselves, or both, they recognize that Asian American Buddhists are not solely responsible for their invisibility. Remediating misrepresentations of American Buddhism must be a collective effort, one that includes not only Asian Americans and others who have been largely absent from mainstream portrayals of American Buddhism, but also white allies who are willing to share the Buddhist mediascape in which their voices currently prevail.

NOTES

¹ Pew Research Center, *Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths* (Washington, D.C., July 19, 2012), <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf>.

² Arun, "Why Is the Under 35 Project So White?," *Angry Asian Buddhist*, August 17, 2012, <http://www.angryasianbuddhist.com/2012/08/why-is-under-35-project-so-white.html>.

³ David K. Yoo, "Introduction: Reframing the U.S. Religious Landscape," in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans*, ed. David K. Yoo (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 6.

⁴ Ted Meissner, "Charles Prebish, Sarah Haynes, Justin Whitaker, Danny Fisher: Two Buddhisms Today," *The Secular Buddhist*, September 22, 2012, <http://secularbuddhism.org/2012/09/22/episode-135-charles-prebish-sarah-haynes-justin-whitaker-danny-fisher-two-buddhisms-today/>.

⁵ Arun, "Why I'm Angry," *Angry Asian Buddhist*, May 8, 2010, <http://www.angryasianbuddhist.com/2010/05/why-im-angry.html>.

⁶ Jane Iwamura, "On Asian Religions without Asians," *Hyphen Magazine*, March 25, 2011, <http://www.hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2011/03/jane-iwamura-asian-religions-without-asians>.

Emergent Buddhist Women’s Leadership: Competing Feminist Views at the Intersection of the Sacred and the Profane

Carol L. Winkelmann

Women have always assumed leadership roles. Historically, these roles have been informal,¹ such as in families and other caretaking sites, in markets, literary salons, and religious sites – locations that require so-called “feminine” emotional, relational, or domestic skills, and other low-status or unpaid labor. Women have been influential as “the power behind thrones,” whether as wives, mistresses, and other unnamed consultants.

In formal settings, women have been leaders in gender-segregated places; for example, in women’s colleges and institutes—roles that may ultimately perpetuate gender binaries. They have been leaders in lineages where blood lines trump gender. However, women often encounter obstacles to formal leadership roles. When they have assumed or been given leadership roles, either as tokens or as in-transit leaders (that is, on their way to motherhood), they have been often subject to heightened criticism, hostility, and contempt.

Indeed, as contemporary women assume higher visibility in public spaces and in positions more commensurate with their gifts and talents, their leadership practices come under considerable scrutiny. For Buddhist women, this applies in their *sanghas*, communities, organizations, and workplaces. In this paper, I reflect on some challenges for women in light of contemporary paradigms from leadership studies and feminist theory.

Leadership Studies

Through time, different approaches have been used to identify effective leadership, all of which have both useful and problematic aspects. I will briefly touch upon five approaches that have had the most currency in secular leadership studies, offering examples of renowned Buddhist leaders – all male, intentionally, because great leaders have been conventionally conceived as male.

First of all, it is often thought that a great leader is born to lead. The quintessential example is the Buddha Gautama. When the young prince Siddhārtha was born, it is widely believed that he was destined to achieve enlightenment and become a Buddha during his lifetime, as a result of the virtuous karma he had accumulated in previous lifetimes.

Second, leadership can be defined or circumscribed by a set of embodied traits or successful characteristics. For example, a virtuous Buddhist leader is guided by the Four Immeasurables, embodying loving-kindness, compassion, joyful attitude, and equanimity. A variant of this approach is to consider a great leader one who has charisma – a sometimes ambiguous attractiveness or charm. For example, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, although born to lead according to the Buddhist principle of *karma* and rebirth, has become a global leader, in no small way by virtue of his great charm or charisma.

The third approach is functional. In this approach, a good leader is one who utilizes particular and sometimes unconventional behaviors to motivate others to act. Depending on the needs of the followers, a great leader can “model the way” or “enable the heart.”² A crazy wisdom teacher, such as the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1939-1987), might use rewards, threats, punishment, shock and awe, as needed.

Sometimes leaders emerge in response to specific situations, in which case, the situation determines or shapes the leader. This fourth approach is exemplified by the Indian tantric practitioner Padmasambhava, who became a great leader in Tibet when Shantarakshita was unable to subdue the demonic forces hindering the establishment of Buddhism at Samye Monastery. Padmasambhava had the power to control and redirect these forces, and thereby fulfilled a major, historically significant leadership role.

A fifth approach is a relational model of leadership, which is currently popular in leadership literature. In this model, a leader strives to create harmonious relationships within the environment. Thích Nhat Hanh, who focuses on the importance of nurturing honest and loving relationships, exemplifies this style – a style largely stereotyped in secular society as a feminine modality.

These theories have been presented to account for and/or to train effective leaders. I argue that, while these theories offer some common sense appeal and heuristic (i.e., learning) benefit to the diverse communities of Buddhist women who are increasingly challenging proprietary, male-only leadership in Buddhist organizations, each approach includes features that may become problematic within specific contexts. Because each and every context is shaped, indeed constituted, by different and intersecting discourses, skillful approaches to leadership will also be responsive to specific locations and situations. In linguistics, context is comprised of participants, interlocutors, and discursal diversity (that is, different historical, cultural, or ideological understandings disseminated by discourse). In brief, it is constructed by verbal and social conditions.

Women's Leadership: An Analysis³ of Gendered Discourses

To illustrate how leadership is thoroughly inflected, even constituted, by different discourses in specific contexts, I will briefly analyze an academic piece titled, “Can Women Become Leaders in the Buddhist Tradition?”⁴ In this work, the author proffers several examples of Buddhist women's leadership embedded within several different discourses, some apparently aligning and some contrary to a progressive aim. Basically, she argues that canonical literature and cultural diversity have provided opportunities for women's leadership that simply are not, but should be, recognized. She does not explicitly use the aforementioned approaches from leadership studies, but these approaches are implicit in her exposition. I identify the approach before I provide an example from her text. The approaches are now gendered female by Holmes-Tagchungdarpa:

A leader is born [male]: “According to some Buddhist narratives, female leadership is impossible due a [sic] women's inability to reach enlightenment, believed to be a limitation of her gender (1/6).

A leader has certain characteristics or traits: “In fact, in South Korea today, more nuns than monks hold Ph.D.s in Buddhist studies” (3/6).

A leader demonstrates certain behaviors: “Others argue that these nuns [who desire full ordination] should focus instead on their practice and service and leave aside matters of worldly rank (2-3/6).

A leader performs certain functions: “Historically, laywomen were crucial patrons of the Buddhist sangha, funding the building of monastic institutions, the composition and publication of Buddhist texts, and the performance of rituals for the upkeep of the cosmos” (3/6).

The situation determines leadership: “... ordination is often secondary to the immediate challenges faced by female renunciants in these Buddhist cultures, who are often housed in economically-marginalized institutions and require institutional and educational support, rather than debates over Buddhist jurisprudence” (3/6).

The author strives for so-called scholarly objectivity by reporting on the historical and cultural record. Theoretical or political positions about gender are assigned to “others,” to jurisprudence, to “critique,” to other times and places. Additionally, the leadership paradigms are arranged alongside of various discourses concerning gender that can then be understood in relation to a general theory of gender: that is, anti-feminist, second wave, or third wave.⁵ Below, I identify the theoretical position, along with the discourse:

1. *An anti-feminist discourse* when she reports, without commentary, that “...the ordination debate has been polarized by critique of ‘Western feminists’ who are perceived by some sangha leaders as pushing their own agenda” (4/6).

2. *Second wave feminist discourse*, that is, language grounded in the notion that women and men are essentially different. She writes: “Buddha refused his stepmother Mahaprajapati’s request for women to be able to become ordained and participate in the sangha, the Buddhist community, three times before he finally acquiesced, but only after she promised that ordained women would follow extra rules” (1/6).

3. *Third wave feminist discourse*, that is, language accommodating the fluidity of meaning and identity. She writes: “This array of attitudes illustrates the diversity of Buddhism, or perhaps more accurately, Buddhisms, and the importance of considering the agency of human communities, not just textual authorities, in providing women opportunities” (5/6).

While deploying these three gendered discourses, the writer studiously avoids celebrating or critiquing any one underlying feminist theory. Instead, she frames the argument in a scholarly or “objective” way. Whether through politesse or cultural sensitivity, she offers neither a critique (in the form, for example, of addressing women’s competency, which has been empirically verified across a range of leadership contexts⁶) nor a more progressive discourse (in the form, for example, of noting that informal positions are not the same as formal positions in terms of power, visibility, and social change).

The net effect of these rhetorical choices is conservative. All leadership paradigms are equally valid; no particular theory of women’s equality is elevated or embraced. Importantly, women are largely relegated to *informal* leadership positions that ultimately reaffirm a gender binary and limit their full leadership potential. Pragmatically speaking, however, Buddhist women must position

themselves vis-à-vis gendered discourses circulating in shifting contexts. In terms of leadership development, Buddhist women need to respond more strategically – not least of all, in relation to processes of globalization wherein universal human rights discourses are increasingly valued over some culturally inflected gendered ones.

Context

To summarize to my argument up to this point, discussions about Buddhist women's leadership tend to centralize the role of the ostensible leader. These discussions are "leader-centric." But the specific contexts in which "leadership" unfolds are constituted by a dynamic flow of the discourses used by participants. Leadership itself is constituted by these discourses. Some discourses, however, accrue more power than others in particular sites.

In *male-dominated contexts*, women's leadership is discursively dismissed as largely unviable. The typical second-wave feminist response has been to strike back with the "*great women's theory of leadership*;" that is, anything a male can achieve, a female can achieve equally or better.⁷ But in male-dominated contexts, this approach does not work well for women because their contributions – whether understood in terms of charisma, behaviors, functionality, or relationality – will always be seen as less valuable. The presence of more women than men in an organization, of course, does not guarantee that the climate will not be male-dominated. It is the discourses surrounding women's leadership that determine the nature of the context; indeed, they are the context.

In *gender-divided contexts*, in which males and females are seen as different but equal (that is, influenced by a second-wave gender ideology), the "great women's theory of leadership" and relational styles can work, because women are at least valued – if only for mistaken reasons. That is, their full human potential (in reality, a mix of both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits or talents) will not be recognized. Yet, if women cooperate by enacting largely stereotypical relational feminine behaviors, they will be tolerated, accepted, and sometimes rewarded.

From a post-feminist standpoint (that is, females are completely equal to males in contemporary societies), male-dominated and gender-divided contexts are equally problematic. The post-feminist organization self-designates as a *gender-neutral context*. Ostensibly, gender is no longer important; thus, well-managed behaviors, traits, functions, and so forth will lead to successful leadership, whether the leader is female or male. In practice, however, the gender-neutral designation falls short. A Buddhist might subscribe to a traits-based paradigm – a virtue approach, for example – with reference to the Four Immeasurables (i.e., love, compassion, joy, and equanimity). Yet the gendered nature of the virtues – how much or little a virtue is valued in light of whether it is gendered masculine or feminine – complicates matters greatly. The virtue approach often aligns with the "motherly" or nurturing type of leader – a type not usually successful in organizations.⁸ It is a rare organization that does not fall back on gender stereotypes, despite claims to neutrality. In reality, gender-neutral sites are essentially male-dominated or gender-divided sites in linguistic masquerade.

Some Notes Toward Buddhist Women's Leadership

As Buddhist women consider leadership development, we need to be mindful that leader-centric paradigms are not always useful. Personally, I find it spiritually edifying to recall the virtues and behaviors of great Buddhist leaders and saints. They are inspiring. On the other hand, it can be harmful, even self-destructive, for women to believe that they can enact particular leadership styles without seriously considering contextual elements. A woman who uses the assertive leadership styles that are conventionally used by men in a male-dominated context or a gender-divided context will meet resistance, dismissal, or even violence, whether psychological or otherwise. And the appeal to prototypical models for great Buddhist leadership, such as saints or deities, does not easily cross cultural contexts. Milarepa and Avalokiteśvara, as metaphors or models for great leadership, have most meaning in particular local or sectarian contexts. They may have next to no currency with secular Buddhists. As pedagogical tools, such models potentially contribute to already problematic divisions between, for example, so-called “ethnic” and “convert” communities.

Only in *gender-multiple* organizations, that is, organizations in which gender is discursively realized as multi-faceted, fluid, and non-binary, and in which identity is viewed as often contradictory and dynamically constituted by gender, race, ethnicity, age, education, language, and so forth (as recognized by third wave feminism), can effective women's leadership be fully supported. In this environment, leaders are welcome to use of a range of styles, and gender is viewed as only one aspect of identity. To date, such inclusive organizational structures are rare or even sporadic; that is, gender-multiple moments are usually temporary or found only in niches. This is likely to increase wherever results are more important than either gender or other aspects of identity. Interestingly, according to research by Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl and her colleagues, female leaders are more positively evaluated by other women and men as their numbers increase.⁹

To conclude, good leadership is not a static quality or condition that can be affixed to a particular person. Neither all leadership theories nor all theories of gender are equally beneficial for women, particularly as they discursively intersect. Context cannot be understood as a fixed set of participants or material conditions. Context is better understood as dynamic and discursive spaces involving participants, interlocutors, their relationships, goals, agendas, perceptions, the circumstances, and understandings of the historical, cultural, and ideological backdrops. All these factors feature in the leadership equation and these elements change from moment to moment. They are dynamically realized through an ever-moving flow of mutually influential discourses.

The wise Buddhist analyzes her actual particular working context and the likely outcomes of intersecting and contradictory discourses, and makes informed decisions about the very viability of her leadership or particular leadership practices. In short, and if you'll bear with some droll humor: She who aspires to work skillfully for the benefit of all sentient beings is perhaps not only a *bodhisattva*, but also a linguist – that is, someone who analyzes language practices!¹⁰

NOTES

¹ Informal roles are typically performed in private or low-visibility realms of activity and involve unofficial power. Formal roles are performed in the public realm and entail recognized, legal, or official power and status. I choose this terminology rather the use of more conventional

“public/private realm” because of the porousness of such divisions and the dynamism of power in practice. Formal leader can exert less actual but more official power than informal leaders.

² This terminology is used in, for example, in James Kouzes and Barry Posner’s *The Leadership Challenge*, 5th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

³ My methodology, feminist post-structuralist discourse analysis, is based on notions of the fluidity of meaning and identity. In post-structuralist (*aka* third-wave or postmodernist) theory, meaning and identity are believed to be construed from ever-shifting, aligning, colliding, or overlapping discourses. Discourses represent and reproduce attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies. My work is influenced greatly by Judith Baxter in *The Language of Female Leadership* (New York: Palgrave, 2010).

⁴ Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, “Can Women Become Leaders in the Buddhist Tradition?” <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/forum/can-women-become-leaders-in-the-buddhist-tradition#>, February 18, 2015. Accessed March 1, 2015. I admire this work as an example of an academic genre – expository writing constructed to be descriptive, educational, and transparent. However, the reason I chose this piece was to illustrate how even well-intended Buddhist discussions of leadership can become problematic.

⁵ My critique of leadership theories is informed by the notion of “intersectionality.” Intersectionality is a concept used to describe the interconnectedness of systemic oppressions: racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia, and so forth. One type of oppression cannot be examined in isolation or simply in addition to other oppressions. For example, we cannot study sexism without recourse to the ways that racism, classism, and homophobia interpenetrate the experience of sex and gender. See Kimberly Crenshaw’s classic article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140(1989): 139-67. Conventional leadership theory and current discussions of Buddhist women’s leadership proceed as if diverse social demographics among women do not exist and/or do not affect leadership viability. Women’s multiple positions, experiences, knowledge, and sensibilities matter, and they affect perceptions of effective leadership via discursive means.

⁶ Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl, Lisa Slattery Walker, and David J. Woehr, “Gender and Perceptions of Leadership Effectiveness: A Meta-Analysis of Contextual Moderators,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 99:6(2014): 1129–45.

⁷ Todd L. Pittinsky, Laura M. Bacon, and Brian Welle, “The Great Women Theory of Leadership,” *Women and Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change*, ed. Barbara Kellerman and Deborah L. Rhode (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

⁸ Kanter (1977), cited in Baxter, *The Language of Female Leadership*, p. 32.

⁹ Samantha C. Paustian-Underdahl, et al, “Gender and Perceptions of Leadership Effectiveness,” 1132–33.

¹⁰ I gratefully acknowledge my Sakyadhita USA colleagues Charlotte Collins and Elise DeVito for their sisterly solidarity and their commentary on my paper.

The Uncomfortable Relationship between the Self-help Boom and Feminism in Korea:

Seokjoo Kang

The concept of “self-help” is very popular in contemporary Korean society. “Self-help,” the management of one’s appearance, health, qualifications, and emotions, has emerged and been promoted as a means of achieving individual success in Korean society. Women tend to be more active than men, and sometimes excessively focused on self-help. As more women pursue career paths, they must project high self-esteem, regardless of their age. A great number of self-help books and leadership lectures are available as self-help tools. These self-help books repeatedly emphasize the slogan, “Women of Korea, take full charge of your own lives.” In my view, the self-help boom has been strongly influenced by feminism, which has continuously conceptualized and articulated the ideals of individuality, independence, sovereignty, and the right to self-determination. Discovering woman’s identity and subjectivity has been a critical issue throughout the history of feminist theories and movements. Feminism is responsible for encouraging women to empower themselves and thus for introducing self-help, because women often experience failures and despair when they face limitations in their lives.

Many intricately connected reasons could explain the current self-help trend. The message of feminism has laid the bedrock for promoting women’s self-help. In the history of feminism, there have been many efforts to recognize women as individuals. Guaranteeing their status as individuals equivalent to men is the first step for women in securing their political rights and eradicating sexual discrimination. “The personal is political” is a slogan familiar to the Korean public. This key motto of Second Wave Feminism in the West was vigorously introduced in Korea during the 1980s and 1990s. The acceptance of women’s personal experiences as worthy of attention in public spaces was the main goal of this wave. It is the message of “the personal” that has proliferated, however, without the political message. I feel that feminism in Korea focuses too much on individuality without sufficient concern for the quality of compassion or the political implications of self-regard. Rather than providing women with the opportunity to correlate their personal experiences with their public persona and social agenda or potential, feminism has emphasized individuality and autonomy. My concern derives from the question: Is it possible that this trend has led some women to fall into narcissism?

The current social epidemic worries me, because it is the driver for excessive individualism. Today’s individuals are expected by society to be solely responsible for their life management and choices. I cannot help but be suspicious; the issues of social instability and risk are minimized as personal issues of self-responsibility and self-realization. Against this backdrop, Korean feminism must pause and reflect to see whether it has laid the foundation for the feminism that has no choice but to befriend the pandemic self-help syndrome by advocating liberal female subjects and insisting on concepts of individual rights and equality. The relationship between the Korean self-help boom and feminism is clearly interdependent, however, and consonant with the Buddhist theory of *patikkasamuppada*, which I will examine shortly.

Meanwhile, the younger generation in Korea tends to accept feminism as a kind of discourse of self-help; they take whichever messages they like and turn them out when they no longer seem useful. This is why feminism is being shunned by both women and men. It seems that feminism has reached its expiration date in Korea. Through careful self-help, successful women in Korea either

cannot see the connection between feminism and their success or they claim that they are not feminists. Men who believe in reverse sexism have declared feminists as their enemy. It is sad to see how feminism has lost the strength to explain itself to the public and is losing significance as a practical movement.

Nevertheless, there exist concepts such as “sisterhood” or “care ethics” in feminism. The feminist concept of sisterhood brings out the issues of solidarity and community that run through all generations, social classes, and religions. The concept of “care ethics” has drawn attention for some time, particularly in Korea. Advocates, however, have failed to propose a substantial solution based on feminist values to address issues such as how to co-exist with and relate to others outside one’s own family. This phenomenon correlates with cultural characteristics in Korea: family-oriented egoism and excessive competition outside of one’s family. In order to survive in modern Korean society, one must look out for oneself. Thus, it is difficult to find self-achieved women who naturally and skillfully ally themselves with others.

For feminism to restore its place as a humanitarian force, it must reexamine the problem of individuality. In Korea, it is still mandatory for women to prove themselves and their achievements as individuals, yet they also must also be able to apply the concept of individuality more broadly. For example, while pursuing self-improvement, women must not cease to pay attention to social otherness; after all, they themselves were once “others” and thus can be expected to hone a sympathizing sensibility. They also need to expand their influence toward the world, not with the tools of individuality, but with strategies of solidarity and shared growth. Feminism also needs to be introspective about its public role in obtaining the power to translate each woman’s experience into a public agenda. Korean feminism can start its rehab by reconsidering personal issues and navigating theoretical and practical methods to recover its public nature.

Taking this stance, I think that lessons from Buddhism could be exceptionally inspiring. The Buddhist teaching of *patīccasamuppāda* (dependent arising) provides an important idea for a paradigm shift in both feminism and the self-help boom. I am going to briefly introduce studies from two theorists: Buddhist philosopher Ok-Sun An from Korea and Joanna Macy, an eco-philosopher from the United States. Building on the work of An and Macy, I will investigate how the concept of *patīccasamuppāda* could be implemented to reconfigure feminism so as to restore its reputation as a compassionate perspective. Further, I will argue that the agenda of individuality in feminism can be refined with the help of Buddhist philosophy.

Ok-Sun An insists that being in relationship with others is the premise of personhood in early Buddhism. She says that the existence of an individual is only possible due to an inevitable correlation with and dependence on others. She believes that respecting and growing with others are essential for one to preserve and truly realize oneself. This approach is deeply related to the core Buddhist theory of *patīccasamuppāda*. In this formula of correlation, my life is enabled by the lives of others. Therefore, we need to understand that our desires for self-preservation and individual happiness are reached in relation to others. An’s work focuses on an interpretation of the early Buddhist scriptures and what her study tells us may differ from the doctrines of Mahayana. She insists that “self-love” was well recognized, not denied, in early Buddhism and was even encouraged.¹ She looks at early Buddhism as a model suggesting that the ideal way to identify and apply self-love entails compassion toward others – in other words, it is human nature to realize love for oneself through love toward others. Therefore, practicing compassion for others is natural; it

relieves pain and negative states of mind and instead brings peace and joy. This ultimately enables a person to truly practice “self-love.” Self-love that entails compassion for others is definitely distinct from a Western concept of individualism that establishes “ego” as a totally isolated and independent state of being.² I believe that An’s interpretation of early Buddhism has important implications for understanding the matter of individuality in feminism and the self-help epidemic in Korea.

Joanna Macy also points out that, according to the Buddhist teachings, human beings are necessarily involved with others. Therefore, we need to question a narrow concept of self-definition and go beyond the wall of ego. Macy has a great deal of interest in explaining common characteristics and interactions between early Buddhist philosophy and general systems theory from the Western world. The core of her studies is her repeated claim that the process of individual enlightenment plays a key role in enlightening one’s community and country. From this point of view, regarding one’s ego as an individual and independent entity that can be fulfilled apart from society and community is a shallow concept. Conventional assumptions like this have contributed to a decrease in the natural wisdom and mercifulness of human beings.³

According to Macy, as the Buddha pointed out, humans’ efforts to fulfill their ego only lead to failure and make them more discontent with the material world.⁴ She insists that the ideal ego is the “ecological-self” that is rooted in *paticcasamuppada*. As an eco-philosopher, Macy tells us that the only way for us to overcome our current philosophical and social crisis is a paradigm shift that expands the individual to the universe. This theoretical process includes being free from modern concepts of ego and restructuring them to incorporate the natural world in a new concept of ego.

As a researcher who takes feminism as a theoretical and practical base, I carefully deliberate about what kind of philosophical ground I would use to build my own theories. Religious or philosophical messages can provide important clues, because they have enduring and universal appeal. Feminism, on a practical level, can critique social problems and figure out structural remedies; it is also righteous in terms of justice. Nevertheless, a theorist must be able to draw a basic picture of human nature based on an intuitive, fundamental faith in the value of being human. This is why it is crucial to understand what constitutes a true human being and to inspire human beings to trust our capabilities and potential. The work of philosophers An and Macy are examples of such efforts. Their studies play significant roles as reference points for restructuring the concept of individuality in a mutually interdependent way. Their work can also remind people to question whether obsessive self-help is really good for their well-being. Furthermore, their work can be a starting point for Korean feminists to address theoretical inadequacies and to stand firm in the face of backlash from the public. Above all, I hope that an understanding of individuality from the perspective of early Buddhist theory can be an engine to drive a paradigm shift in Korean feminism.

NOTES

¹ Ok-Sun An, “The Mutual Practice of Self-love and Other-love,” *Philosophy* [Korean Philosophical Association] 76(2003) 80.

² Ok-Sun An, *Buddhism and Human Rights* (Seoul: Buddhistbook, 2008), p. 176.

³ Joanna Macy, *Mutual Causality in Buddhism and General Systems Theory: The Dharma of Natural Systems* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 192.

⁴ Ibid., p. 251.

Unveiling the Lives of Great Female Masters of Bhutan

Sonam Wangmo (Tenzin Dadon)

Buddhism expounds gender equality and its philosophy contains numerous teachings on the “ultimate irrelevance of gender.”¹ Buddhism, for example, has a monastic institution (*sangha*), founded by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni for both men and women to be free from the drudgery of family life and lay struggles. The monastic order is meant to provide a conducive environment to practice the teachings (Dharma) for the ultimate purpose of becoming liberated from the cycle of births and deaths (*samsāra*). However, Buddhism, whose doctrines are rich in gender egalitarianism is not entirely free from institutionalized male dominance and misogynistic elements. Despite its best intentions for women’s liberation from stereotypical family roles, Buddhist practice has not been able to fully grant women their place within the *sangha* and other aspects of religious practice that are freely available to men.

Women are excluded from higher ordination, leadership roles, and ritual practices, which contradicts the basic tenets of Buddhism as a religion grounded on equanimity. Furthermore, women are told that they are unable to achieve Buddhahood, which is certainly not the case. Women’s subordination in a patriarchal monastic institution is only part of the discrimination faced by Buddhist women. In addition, there are misogynistic elements in Buddhism that perpetuate the subordination of women.²

In response to institutionalized male dominance and misogynistic tendencies within Buddhism, the Mahāyāna doctrine of nondualism based on Arya Nāgarjuna’s Mādhyamaka view of emptiness reasons that since nothing exists inherently, then femininity, which is the basis of discrimination against women, also does not exist inherently. Thus, women cannot be disqualified from spiritual practice and attainments, because emptiness transcends gender.³ This new ideal of gender nondualism is wholly expressed in Vajrayāna Buddhism, although there its origins can be traced to the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) literature of the early Mahāyāna period.⁴ The integration of femininity and masculinity within Buddhist practice is what Sponberg refers to as soteriological androgyny, which is a “new ideal of a dialectical androgyny [which] finds its fullest expression after the sixth century CE in the Vajrayāna literature of later Indo-Tibetan Buddhism.”⁵

Indeed, women played a very important role in the initial development of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Tibet. Female manifestations of enlightenment include such beings as Prajñāpāramitā, Tāra, and Vajrayoginī; biographies of realized women such as Yeshé Tsogyal and Gelongma Palmo serve as flesh and blood role models.⁶ Sponberg alludes to great numbers of highly realized women practitioners and masters, especially in Tibet and the Tibetan cultural area where Vajrayāna Buddhism is practiced, due to “soteriological androgyny.”

According to Sponberg, the effect of this androgynous ideal on Buddhist women is that the “repression of female spiritual practice sanctioned by the androcentricism and misogyny of the monastic establishment” is less prevalent.⁷ Thus, the core of soteriological androgyny is the state of androgynous integration that cancels out the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity. A Tibetan proverb clearly illustrates this point: “In the enlightened thought there is no male and female,” analogous to “In the enlightened speech there is no near and far.”⁸ The doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) essentially espouses that “Dharma is neither male nor female,” i.e., it is beyond all dualistic conceptions.⁹ As such, scores of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhist women practitioners have attained high

realizations on the spiritual path, with some attaining complete enlightenment.

I have given some examples of famous and highly revered female Vajrayāna Buddhist practitioners. Yeshé Tsogyal was the spiritual consort of Guru Rinpoche. Machig Drupay Gyalmo was a female *siddha* of India who revealed the practice of Amitayus, the Buddha of Longlife. Jetsün Niguma, sister of the Mahasiddha Naropa, manifested as a tenth-level bodhisattva. It is said that she saw the face of Dorje Chang Niguma directly and accomplished all three bodies of the Buddha. Khyungpo Naljor, Niguma's foremost disciple, brought her teachings to Tibet and established the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, one of the eight transmission lineages of Tibet. Khandroma Sukhasiddhi, a laywoman with a husband and six children, is said to have accomplished complete enlightenment. Paldarbum was renowned for achieving complete enlightenment in a single lifetime. Rechungma was a realized student of the great Tibetan yogi Milarepa. Sahle Aui, a student of Milarepa who meditated in solitude for many years, is said to have achieved enlightenment. Machig Lhabkyi Dronma (1055–1152) is famed for mastering the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and founding the lineage of *chöd* practice in Tibet. Jomo Menmo (1248–1283) was recognized as the activity emanation of Yeshé Tsogyal and also of Machig Labdron. Jetsünma Shukseb (1865–1951), renowned as Ani Lochen, was a master of *chöd* practice. Jetsünma Thrinley Chödrön (19th–20th century). Sera Khandro Deway Dorje (1899–1952) was a great female treasure revealer (*terton*) whose treasure texts are revered by many great Nyingma masters. Tseringma, a female goddess who was tamed by Jetsün Milarepa, is revered as a tenth-level *bodhisattva* and a protector of the Dharma. Jetsünma Tsewang Lhamo (d.1995) was a daughter of Tritsab Pema Wangchen and she was a grand-aunt to Mindrolling Trichen. Jetsünma Khandro Rinpoche is a contemporary female reincarnate *lama* (*trulku*) who is recognized as the rebirth of a highly accomplished *yogini* called Khandro Ugyen Tsomo, herself an incarnation of Yeshé Tsogyal. Gelongma Karma Khechog Palmo (Frieda Bedi, 1921–1977), an English woman who was the first foreign nun in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, has taken rebirth as a female *trulku*, Jamyang Drolma Lama, who now stays at Karma Drubgyu Thargay Ling in Tilokpur, Himachal Pradesh, India. Jetsünma Tenzin Palmo, a contemporary English nun who spent 12 years in a Himalayan cave, is especially revered by Western Buddhists.

These female masters have continued to inspire generations of Vajrayāna Buddhist women in the Himalayas and have now become role models for Western Buddhists and other non-Himalayan Vajrayāna Buddhists who yearn to identify with female Buddhist personalities who can inspire them on the path to enlightenment. Yet, these are just a handful of the Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhist women who are known to us. Scores of great female masters remain in obscurity and forgotten because their stories were deemed too insignificant to be recorded for posterity, largely on the basis of their female gender.

The Omission of Female Masters in Buddhist Literature

The prevalence of male masters in the Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition is a well-known fact. In contrast, there is a lack of biographical and hagiographical information on female masters in the tradition. Nonetheless, Buddhist literature was not always so androcentric. There is much literature on women masters from early Buddhism. We know of numerous women who achieved arhatship (liberation from the cycle of birth and death) and other stages of sainthood during the time of the historical Buddha. Early Buddhist literature tells us that the *bhiksuni* order was very well

respected, produced numerous *arhats*, and was crucial in the development and spread of Buddhism in ancient India.¹⁰ The biographies of prominent *bhiksunīs*, based on books such as the *Therīgāthā*, *Dharmapada*, Vinaya Piṭaka, and Vinaya Aṭṭhakathā provide tangible evidence that *bhiksunīs* in early Buddhism attained liberation. Their attainment became a model for women in Buddhism because it demonstrated that women were as capable as men in achieving the highest spiritual goal, shattering the prevailing belief that women were not capable of spiritual attainments.

The achievements of these illustrious early Buddhist nuns somehow became a distant memory when patriarchy crept into monastic Buddhism. Eventually, the prestige and status of female monastics declined in monastic Buddhism in India. Indian Buddhist nuns ceased to be mentioned in any official record, although we know from Chinese pilgrims that the order of nuns in India did exist well into the seventh century and from inscriptional evidence that it survived until the eleventh century. However, there is no evidence that Buddhist nuns were enrolled in any of the six great Buddhist monastic universities of India.¹¹ Buddhist nuns were either prohibited from scholarly pursuits in these monastic universities or Buddhist literature simply failed to mention the scholarly pursuits of Buddhist nuns.

The omission of women from Buddhist literature has resulted in gaps in knowledge pertaining to women Buddhist practitioners, their achievements, and their contributions to their respective communities. The absence of women in official records does not mean that women did not accomplish anything worthy of mention. On the contrary, the period when women's status and role in monastic Buddhism began to decline corresponds to a similar increase in women's achievements as religious adepts in their own right, outside the monastic system. With a decline of women's participation in monastic Buddhism came a renewed emphasis on yogic Buddhism that supported women's Buddhist practice, especially tantric Buddhism.¹²

In Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, biographies are often written by male monastics from an androcentric perspective, thus, they overlook women's contributions and achievements.¹³ Lhaje Jobum, a twelfth-century female adept was an important lineage holder of the Kālācakra tantra of the Dro system,¹⁴ but her name was not mentioned as a lineage holder in the brief account of the early Dro system lineage in Bu-ston's account. A slightly later Kālācakra history, dating from 1360, mentions her only as a teacher of some relatively minor practices and precepts transmitted to her brother Semo Chewa.

Orgyan Chökyi of Dolpo, Tibet was one of four women in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism whose autobiographies are extant. As the earliest datable Tibetan woman's autobiography, the *Life of Orgyan Chökyi* holds an important place among Tibetan autobiographies.¹⁵ If she had relied on male masters to document her life story, we would not possess a detailed biographical of this 17th-century Tibetan nun. Because she was illiterate, Orgyan Chökyi approached her teacher Orgyan Tenzin to request his help in penning her life story, but instead of encouraging her and providing assistance, he seized the opportunity to ridicule her, because she was a woman, as seen from the following conversation:

“I have good reason to write a few words on my joys and sufferings. Therefore I pray of you master, write it down.”

.....Orgyan Tenzin scolds her: “There is no reason to write a Life for you – a woman.” And

thinking on this woman's words, he adds: "You must be silent!"

She responds, "If I knew how to write," she writes (paradoxically), "I would have reason to write of my joys and sufferings."¹⁶

Her autobiography states that she was then visited by *dākinīs*, who gave her instructions. As Schaeffer notes, "But more than this, the *dākinīs* gave her the gift of writing. She was freed of the 'impediment,' illiteracy, and she could now carry out her wishes under the authority of the *dākinīs*."

With the exception of Yeshé Tsogyal, Machig Labdron, and Orgyan Chökyi, many of the great female adepts' biographies are probably extracted from the (oral or written) biographies of their male students, often not even direct disciples, a few generations down the line.¹⁷ Hence, very little is known about their early lives or practices. For example, we know of Jetsün Niguma and Sukhasiddhi from the biography of Khyungpo Naljor. Gelongma Palmo's life story is known through oral transmission of the Nyungne lineage. Jobum and Dremo's life stories are found in the *The Blue Annals*.

This trend of androcentric scholarship on religious history still prevails today. In the case of Bhutan, women are hardly mentioned in any religious biography. Phuntsho's recent *History of Bhutan* hardly mentions any female masters; the entire book is littered with excerpts from the lives of male religious personalities, from medieval to modern times.¹⁸ For example, he writes about Phajo Drugpo Shigpo in detail,¹⁹ with only minor references to his wife, Khandro Sonam Peldren, who was herself a highly accomplished female master who contributed much to the religious history of Bhutan. Phuntsho chooses to portray the history of Bhutan by focusing solely on the male members of her family. For example, the name of her daughter is missing, whereas the lives of her five sons are described in detail. This and many other instances of androcentric scholarship have contributed to the lost female voices in Bhutan, painting a skewed picture, as if Bhutanese women were unimportant, ordinary, and confined to the household, making little or no contribution to the religious and political history of Bhutan.

Rationale and Methodology of the Study

Women in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural area, spanning Ladakh, Zangskar, Lahaul, Spiti in the northwest of India to Tibet and Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh have struggled against male dominance in the religious and private domains, which has resulted in reduced opportunities for religious practice. Many are confined to the drudgery of household and farm work. These women, including renunciant women, are especially challenged in terms of acquiring spiritual instructions, securing monastic education, and access to basic requisites.²⁰ As a result, women in the Tibetan cultural area, much like their sisters in other traditional Buddhist countries in Asia, have not been able to realize their fullest spiritual potential and many crave a male body in their next life, which they fervently believe will provide them with the endowments to practice Dharma effectively.

Further, Himalayan Buddhist women lack access to role models of their own gender. Simmer-Brown asserts that the *trulku* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is patriarchal, as women *trulkus* and lineage holders are rare.²¹ Hence, women are in dire need of female role models who have tread the Buddhist path and attained realizations or become enlightened.

There have been outstanding women in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism who, despite prevailing cultural attitudes towards women, have defied all odds and gone on to become enlightened masters. Ironically, precious little is known about female Buddhist masters in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism. Moreover, the corpus of biographies and hagiographies that have come down to us mostly document female masters from Tibet, even anecdotal evidence attest to the prevalence of highly realized women practitioners from other Vajrayāna Buddhist regions of the Himalayas, such as Zangskar and Bhutan. Until recently, there were no attempts to document and publish literature pertaining to the lives of accomplished female masters in Bhutan. Bhutanese women have long heard of stories of accomplished women, but these stories have been largely unverified due to the relative scarcity of data on female Buddhist practitioners in Bhutan.

Like the life stories of the early Buddhist *bhiksunīs*, a considerable number of stories of great female masters of the Tibetan Vajrayāna tradition have come down to us through stories that have been kept alive in the collective memory of people who were associated with these masters. These stories have also been transmitted orally for hundreds of years. Generally, stories of great female masters can be found in the songs of Milarepa, the *siddhas*, the music of the *chö* and *shije* traditions, and from oral legends told in local communities, as is the case with great female masters in Bhutan.

Documented evidence of Bhutanese female masters such as Ani Lopönma Paldon and Ani Tulku are based on the efforts of Bhiksuni Tsultrim Wangmo in her recent publication, *Nunneries of Bhutan (A Brief Guide)*.²² She obtained her data from oral sources, as I had also done during my fieldwork at Jachung Karmo Nunnery, Punakha, in western Bhutan, and Jashar Goenpa, Pemagatshel, in eastern Bhutan. In this paper, I have built on Wangmo's efforts, supported by my own field research data collected since 2012. My aim has been to document the life stories of four eminent Bhutanese masters: Choeten Zangmo, Jamyang Choden, Dorje Phagmo, and Trulku Chozang Lhamo. My hope is to contribute in some small yet significant way to empowering contemporary and future female Buddhist practitioners, to demonstrate to Bhutanese women especially that attaining enlightenment in a female body is certainly a possibility.

The Emergence of Vajrayāna Buddhism and *Yoginis* in India and Tibet

In order to understand women's role in Vajrayāna Buddhism, it is imperative to have some background knowledge on the tradition and how it has shaped women masters. Tantric or Vajrayāna Buddhism emerged in India around the seventh century. Although the travelogue of the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (596–664 C.E), who traveled all over India between 629 and 645 CE, does not mention tantric texts or practice, by the time Wuxing, another Chinese pilgrim, traveled to India around 680 CE, Vajrayāna had already infiltrated monastic Buddhism in northern India.²³ Even though at that time monastic Buddhism had a strong foothold in India, especially with the flourishing of the six ancient Buddhist universities (notably Nalanda and Vikramashila monastic universities in northern and eastern India), a movement that signified a departure from institutionalised Buddhism was slowly emerging and peaked during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The new movement of yogic Buddhism eventually helped bridge the gender gap in Buddhism created by monastic Buddhism.

There is evidence to document that women in India practiced Vajrayāna Buddhism. If the Dzogchen Semde lineage's account of 21 lineage masters is historically accurate, women tantric

adepts such as Princess Barani²⁴ existed from as early as the late fourth/early fifth century CE in Oddiyāna, northwestern India.²⁵ After a gap of three centuries, in the eighth century accounts begin to appear of Indian female adepts such as Mandarava from the kingdom of Zahor in north India²⁶ and also Nepalese women such as Sakyadevi and Kalasiddhi. When Buddhism was transplanted to Tibet by Guru Padmasambhava in the late eighth century, during the reign of King Trisong Deutsen (r. 756–797 CE), Tibetan women began to emerge as tantric masters. Some assert that the first ever Tibetan to attain complete enlightenment was a woman, Yeshé Tsogyal.²⁷ She was a heart disciple and consort of Guru Padmasambhava, who prophesied her birth as one who would play an instrumental role in assisting him to establish and propagate the Dharma in Tibet. Yeshé Tsogyal accomplished complete enlightenment and was responsible for preserving some of the rarest teachings of the Dharma. Since the time of Yeshé Tsogyal, countless women in Tibet and elsewhere in the Himalayas have attained great realizations following the path of yogic Buddhism.

Reclaiming the Lost Women Masters in Vajrayāna Buddhism

Women in Vajrayāna Buddhism were and still are eminent in various capacities. There is documented evidence of the high spiritual accomplishments of women in all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism: Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug. Many of these women's names were not recorded in history, yet according to Bokar Rinpoche: "Their rank was then equal to that of men. They could teach, give empowerments, and accomplish all the activities of the dharma."²⁸ Martin (2005) identifies six categories of eminent Buddhist women in Vajrayāna Buddhism: prophets, disciples, lineage holders, leaders of popular religious movements, teachers, and nuns. Many of these great female adepts attained enlightenment and became teachers and lineage masters, guiding scores of disciples, both male and female in an unbroken lineage from generation to generation, which continues until the present day.

Apart from having great realizations, these women played crucial roles as founders and lineage holders of special transmissions and practices. As treasure revealers (*terton*), they either discovered hidden treasure texts (*terma*) or were the catalyst for the discovery of *termas*. Famous *tertons* include Jomo Menmo, Sera Khandro, Aro Lingma, and the more contemporary Khandro Tare Lhamo and Khandroma Palden Chotso. Most of these women were renowned *yoginis* practicing in retreat.

Many of these great female adepts were either founders of lineages or important lineage holders. Jetsün Niguma and Sukhasiddhi were great eleventh-century *dākinīs* who are known as the founders of the Shangpa Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, since they passed their lineage to Khyungpo Naljor who firmly established the lineage in Tibet. Gelongma Palmo and Machig Lhabron developed their own unique practices, namely, the fasting practice (*nyungne*) of thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig) and *chöd*, respectively. Aro Lingma (1886–1923) was a female lama who discovered the Aro gTér (*terma*) and thereby founded the Aro lineage. Lhaje Jobum, a twelfth-century female adept, was an important lineage holder of the Dro system of the Kālācakra tantra. Jetsün Migyur Paldrön (1699–1769), the daughter of Mindrolling founder Terdak Lingpa, was a lineage holder of the three sections of Dzogchen. Jetsün Trinley Chödrön, the daughter of the fifth holder of the Mindrolling throne (*trichen*) was the supreme lineage holder of the natural Great Perfection, or Dzogchen lineage. She is credited with having kept alive the lineages of many

great dzogchen teachings through a difficult historical period and thus her contribution to the preservation of the Nyingma teachings is one of the greatest and most widely remembered. Jetsünma Tamdrin Wangmo (1836–1896) of the Sakya Khon family was a lineage holder of Lamdre Tsokshe, Lamdre Lobshe, Vajramāla, and many other important lineages of the Sakya tradition. Kunga Zangmo (1459–1502), the incarnation of Chökyi Dronma, initiated the incarnate line of the Samding Dorje Phagmo, a lineage associated with the *dākinī* Vajravarahi and Samding Monastery.²⁹

Many women were also the spiritual consorts³⁰ (*sangyum*³¹) of great yogis. These spiritual consorts were regarded as highly realized masters in their own right. Examples include Yeshé Tsogyal, Mandarava, Sakyadevi, Kalasiddhi, Sukhasiddhi, Tashi Khyidren, Shelkar Dorje Tso, Machig Labdron, Machig Zhama, Jomo Menmo, Lhadzin Yangchen Drolma, Khandro Tsering Chödrön, Sera Khandro, Khandro Choying Nyima Ozer, Chödrung Rinpoche (Drikung Khandro), Pema Ozer, Khandro Urgyen Tsomo, Aro Lingma, A-shé Khandro, and A-yé Khandro.

Most of these great female adepts were not part of monastic institutions, but there were also great *yoginis* who were Buddhist nuns. Many of these notable historical figures came from humble backgrounds: Gelongma Machig Ongjo, reportedly a fully-ordained nun³² in eleventh century Tibet); Tsunma Orgyan Chökyi (1675–1724), who lived in Tibet; Jetsünma Ngawang Dolma, who lived in 17th-century Bhutan; Jetsünma Shugseb (Tsunma Lochen Chonyi Zangmo; 1865–1950/51; Khandro Rig'dzin Gongtsal Takmo who lived early in the 20th century in Tibet); Gelongma Karma Kechog Palmo a 20th-century English nun; Lopönma Paldon (1926–1997) of Bhutan; Tsunma Yeshé Sangmo of Tibet; Yeshé Lhamo of Zangskar); Lama Sherab Zangmo (d. 2009) of Tibet; and Lama Tamke Wangmo (d. 2012). These nuns mainly lived as *yoginis*, although some of them also founded nunneries and held monastic positions, such as abbess, teacher, and so on. Nuns in this category generally practiced in retreat during the early part of their careers and then assumed monastic positions later on. By contrast, Orgyan Chökyi labored in her family's fields and trained in a monastery before finally getting the opportunity to go into retreat after the age of 30. Despite encountering numerous obstacles on the path, all these nuns demonstrated high levels of attainment and some even attained rainbow bodies.

Another category of nuns hailed from distinguished families, such as royalty, or were the daughters of lineage holders, *tertons*, or highly realized masters. Nuns who were of royal descent include Princess Barani (daughter of King Dhahenatalo of Oddiyāna, fifth century C.E), Princess Mandarava (daughter of King Shastradhara, Zahor; she later disrobed to become a consort of Guru Padmasambhava), Gelongma Palmo (a princess of Oddiyāna, eleventh century), and Chökyi Dronma,³³ who was the daughter of King Tri Lhawang Gyeltsen (1404–1464) of Gungtang, Tibet, and was later recognized as the first Samding Dorje Phagmo. Nuns who were daughters of lineage holders or *tertons* include Jetsünma Mingyur Paldon,³⁴ Jetsünma Chime Tenpai Nyima,³⁵ Jetsünma Tamdrin Wangmo,³⁶ Kyabgon Pema Trinle,³⁷ and Anim Choeten Zangmo³⁸ from Bumthang, Bhutan. These privileged nuns were believed to be wisdom *dākinīs* who have emanated as living women in order to preserve and propagate their respective lineages.

It is noteworthy that all these nuns attained realizations by pursuing the yogic traditions of the Vajrayāna path, yet they returned to the monastic realm with greater respect and status. Nuns from great lineages, such as Mindrolling (Nyingma) and Sakya had an added advantage, because they were generally less likely to be subjected to patriarchal norms such as servitude to the monks and a lack of access to tantric instructions and monastic education. Nevertheless, written records attest

that they did encounter obstacles on the monastic path.

Special mention must also be made of *delog*,³⁹ defined as “people who come back from the dead and act as messengers of the dead and preachers of virtuous action and the effects of karma.” Famous women who died and came back to life to narrate accounts of their afterlife experience are Nangsa Obum⁴⁰ (11th- to 12th-century Tibet); Lingza Chökyi, a 16th-century Tibetan *delog* whose accounts of the afterlife became the source narrative for subsequent *delog* accounts; Karma Wangzin (17th-century Tibet), considered by many to be the most illustrious *delog* in the Himalayan region; Khandro Drowa Zangmo (15th- to 16th-century Bhutan), and the Dawa Drolma (20th-century Tibet), the mother of Chagdud Trulku.

There have been many great female masters in Bhutan, but due to a scarcity of written records, these women have largely disappeared from Bhutanese history. Some of these women are remembered because they were from illustrious families; were founders of monasteries or nunneries, such as the medieval nun Chumey Jetsünma Chöden Wangmo; or because they held high positions in their nunneries, such as abbess, as is the case with the recent Jamyang Chöden. Interestingly, each time a female practitioner is thought to be highly realized, she is almost always associated with a wisdom *dākinī*.

Anim Choeten Zangmo (Chumey Jetsünma Chöden Wangmo)

Anim Choeten Zangmo,⁴¹ a wisdom *dākinī* from Bumthang, Bhutan, was the daughter of Tenzin Chogyal. Her paternal grandfather was Sangdag, the youngest son of Tertön Rigdzin Pema Lingpa (1450–1521), a renowned Nyingmapa master of Bhutan.⁴² Anim Choeten Zangmo was a nun at Chumey Zhuri Gonpa, a nunnery in Bumthang, and is well-known in Mongar District as the one who started Buddhism in Drametse.⁴³ Today she is especially remembered because of her connection to Drametse Monastery, which she founded in 1511.

Anim Choeten Zangmo’s embalmed body (*kudung*) is kept at Drametse⁴⁴ Monastery. This monastery was built in 1511 and was blessed by three great lamas: Kinga Drakpa from Tango, Zhabdrung Jigme Chogyel from Gantey, and Tenpai Nima. The monastery has great social, religious, and artistic significance, especially due to the Dzogchen practices of the Peling Terchoe lineage that were revealed by Anim Choeten Zangmo’s great-grandfather, Tertön Pema Lingpa (1450–1521). The monastery also houses a *dākinī kapala* (skull) with the self-arisen syllables “*om ah hung*” clearly appearing on the outer surface of the skull in three dimensions. This object of veneration was brought to Bhutan from Samye Monastery in Tibet after it was rediscovered by Tertön Pema Lingpa during one of his visits to Lhasa. The skull is believed to have been hidden by Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshé Tsogyal when Samye Monastery was completed in 769. It was kept in the treasure box (*ter gam*) of Tamzhing Lhuendrup Choeling until Anim Choeten Zangmo reached 16 years of age, when she fled Bumthang to escape a proposal of marriage to the son of a feudal lord known as Chokhor Deb Kunthub. She received this sacred object as a share of her inheritance from her father Tenzin Chogyal.

Bhutanese Buddhists believe that the term *dram tse* (the sound *dra*) was coined in reference to a white conch shell (*dungkhar*) that belonged to Anim Choeten Zangmo. Whenever she blew it and a clear sound emanated to a place, that place would be the site of a prophecy. Incidentally, the conch gave out a clear sound when she blew it upon reaching Drametse; hence, this was the

beginning of her auspicious connection with this place.

The annual three-day festival of Drametse Kangso Chhenmo, known locally as Dawa Chupa Kangsol Chenmo, is held during the tenth month of the Bhutanese calendar. The festival, held at Namdroel Ugyen Chholing Monastery in Drametse, attracts people not only from Drametse, but also from Narang and Ballam Gewogs sub-districts of the district of Mongar Dzongkhag and adjoining villages in the district of Trashigang Dzongkhag. The main event is a grand fire ceremony, which is accompanied by sacred *vajra* dances that were revealed by Tertön Pema Lingpa. These ritual dances are performed only in Drametse Monastery. This ritual fire ceremony, performed in the courtyard of the monastery by the lay practitioners (*gomchen*) and monks on the eve of the Drametse Kangso Chhenmo, has a special connection to the life of Anim Choeten Zangmo. Legend has it that the ceremony originated from a funeral ceremony performed by Anim Choeten Zangmo soon after the spiritual culmination of her three years of Dzogchen practice while she was abiding in the state of primordial nature. Through her divine vision, Anim Choeten Zangmo saw a human-sized caterpillar that had been trapped under a huge, unbreakable stone at the time of digging the foundation stone of the Drametse Monastery in 1511. The caterpillar was believed to be a hell being who had been trapped there for eons as a result of negative deeds in a past life. As a wisdom *dākinī*, Anim Choeten Zangmo was predestined to free the tormented insect. Thereafter, annual grand fire ceremonies with *vajra* dances⁴⁵ have been continuously performed in Drametse Monastery to commemorate this event in her life.⁴⁶ Little else is known about her life. She and another nun, Gelongma⁴⁷ Lhaden Zangmo, “were popular Buddhist nuns of their time.”⁴⁸

Jamyang Chöden (Ani Lopönma Paldon)

Jamyang Chöden, better known as Ani Lopönma Paldon or simply Ani Lopen, was born in 1926 in Bhutan as the only daughter in her family. Her mother was Ashi Deki of Kurtoe and her father was an attendant to Bhutan’s second king. She did not receive any formal schooling, as girls had no access to education at that time.⁴⁹ She was extremely fortunate to have received private tutoring in the study of scripture and grammar, and was skilled at writing poetry.

She did her preliminary practice (*ngön dro*) retreat when she was 13 years old. She completed two three-year retreats under the guidance of Lopen Tsam Metok Pasang at Nalanda,⁵⁰ near Talo in Punakha District. Toward the end of her six years of retreat, the *torma* on the shrine in her retreat house became as fresh as new. After she completed the retreat, she received instructions on the Six Yogas of Naropa (*Naro chu drug*) from Dho Chorten Lopen Karma Tshering. Due to her extensive learning, she was appointed the abbess (*lopönma*) of Jachung Karmo Nunnery at the young age of 25. There, she undertook the *nyungne* fasting practice of Gelongma Palmo, which is based on the practice of Thousand-armed Chenrezig. One day, after she had completed 1,000 pair of *nyungne*, she was invited to Nalanda Monastery to lead a *nyungne puja*. While presiding at the *puja*, many people witnessed a sacred water vase on the shrine overflowing. This wondrous event was reported to the head monk, who praised her great realization, which he said accounted for the miracle.

Ani Lopönma Paldon retired as the abbess of Jachung Karmo in 1976, when she was 50 years old. She spent her remaining years meditating in various holy places, caves, and cremation grounds. She had a retreat house at Hongtso Tashigang Monastery. In the summer of 1986, she was re-appointed as the abbess of Jachung Karmo Nunnery in a grand procession to the nunnery, escorted

by 25 nuns. She passed away in 1997, at the age of 81, and was cremated at Jachung Karmo. A stupa was built at the cremation site to house her relics.

Dorje Phagmo of Bhutan

Dorji Phamo of Bhutan was recognized by Sakya Lama Rikey Jatrel as an incarnation of Thangthong Gyalpo (1285–464 or 1361–1485), also known as the Iron Bridge Maker (*ICags zam pa*). She is placed in the Dorje Phagmo lineage of incarnations in Bhutan, which is distinct from the Dorje Phagmo lineage of incarnations in Tibet.⁵¹ For many years, since her childhood, Dorje Phagmo lived at Zilukha Dewachen Drupthop Monastery (in Thimphu), which follows the Nyingma and the Shangpa Kagyu traditions. After that, she went to Ngagyur Nyingma Nunnery Institute in Mysore District (Karnataka State) in South India to study under H. H. Penor Rinpoche. Dorje Phagmo is a founder of Pema Chopeling Nyingma Nunnery in Jang Maber Tokchay, located in Jangaring (Kikhar) Village in the district of Nangkhör Geog in Zhemgang Dzongkhag. Some of her disciples are based in Thimphu where, along with her, they perform prayers and other services for the laity.

Ani Trulku Chozang Lhamo

Ani Trulku Chozang Lhamo (b. 1983) is regarded as the reincarnation of Ani Yosel Chöden, the founder of Jashar Ani Gonpa, located in Pema Gatsel. Ani Yosel Chöden was a renowned contemplative (*tsampa*), one who stays in retreat. After she established Jashar Ani Gonpa, she went into a lifelong retreat. For this reason, she is known as Ani Tse Tsampa (Nun in Retreat for Life). It is said that all the high lamas of Bhutan visited her. She had many students, both male and female. One of her students is Lama Jangchub, who founded Chödphu Gonpa and Yosel Choling Nunnery. Another student of hers is Lama Gyeltshen, who founded Gayri Ugyen Phunstsho Choling Nunnery. He is now in lifelong retreat. The Dorje Lopen (Vajra Master) of Jashar Gonpa, Ani Kunzang Wangmo, is another disciple of hers.

Ani Trulku Chozang Lhamo was born in Samdrup Jongkhar, Bhutan, and was recognized as a reincarnation of Ani Yosel Chöden at the age of five. She was brought to Thimphu Zilukha Dewachen Drupthop Monastery for studies. At the age of nine, she became the chanting and *puja* master (*umzid*) at Zilukha. At the age of 15, she returned to Jashar Ani Gonpa. There, under the supervision of Gyeltshen Trulku Rinpoche, she went into a three-year retreat, eventually completing six years of retreat. When she was 21, Gyeltshen Trulku Rinpoche appointed her to be the Dorje Lopen of Jashar Gonpa. This is the first time in this century that such a title had been given to a nun. After serving the monastery for seven years as Vajra Master, she again went into retreat.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the great spiritual attainments of female masters in Tibetan Vajrayāna Buddhism, focusing on Bhutanese women masters. There are a number of other highly realized female practitioners in contemporary Bhutan, but, due to difficulty in gaining access to them, here I have introduced life stories of just two of them: Dorje Phagmo and Ani Trulku Chozang Lhamo. Nonetheless, efforts are currently underway to document the life stories of additional

contemporary masters in a bid to raise awareness about the equal spiritual potential of women on the Buddhist path. It is my sincere hope that these storioies will inspire female practitioners throughout the world, and especially in Bhutan, to demonstrate that enlightenment is not solely a male prerogative. Women, too, can attain realization on the path to liberation shown by the Buddha and eventually become enlightened.

NOTES

¹ Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion* (New York: Beacon Press Books, 1996), p. 92.

² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³ *Ibid.* P. 137.

⁴ These texts beging to appear around the first century CE. Alan Sponberg, “Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism,” *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Cabezón (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1992), pp. 3–36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Awakenings: Educating Himalayan Buddhist Nuns,” *Bhikkhuni Education in Contemporary Society* (Taipei: Xiang Guang Institute, 2009), pp. 450–62; and Kim Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun: The Struggle for Enlightenment in the Himalayas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁷ Sponberg, “Attitudes Toward Women, p. 28.

⁸ Gutschow, *Being a Buddhist Nun*, p. 5.

⁹ Kay Kopperdrayer, quoting Gross, in *Feminist Applications of Buddhist Thought. Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 23:1(2007) 126.

¹⁰ Bela Bhattacharya, *Buddhist Women Saints of India* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 2000); and Duangporn Kumhomkun, “The Role of Prominent Bhikshunis in the Development of Early Indian Buddhism,” doctoral dissertation, Delhi University, 2010.

¹¹ Nalanda, Vikramasila, Odantapuri, Jagadalala, Somapura, Vallabhi.

¹² Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dākinī's Warm Breath: the Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston & London: Shambala, 2002).

¹³ Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, p. 74

¹⁴ D. Martin, “The Woman Illusion? Research Into the Lives of Spiritually Accomplished Women Leaders of the 11th and 12th Centuries,” *Women in Tibet*, ed. Hanna Havnevik and Janet

Gyatso (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2005), p. 64.

¹⁵ Kurt R. Schaeffer, *Himalayan Hermitess: The Life of a Tibetan Buddhist Nun* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁷ Martin, “The Woman Illusion?” p. 64.

¹⁸ K. Phuntsho, *The History of Bhutan* (Calcutta: Random House India, 2013).

¹⁹ Credited with establishing the Drukpa Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism in Bhutan

²⁰ Tsomo, “Awakenings: Educating Himalayan Buddhist Nuns,” pp. 450–62; and Tsultrim Wangmo (trans. G. S. Gyeltshen), *Nunneries of Bhutan (A Brief Guide)* (Phuentsholing: Kuensel Corp., 2013)

²¹ Simmer-Brown, *Dākinī's Warm Breath*, p. 140.

²² Wangmo, *Nunneries of Bhutan*.

²³ John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), p. 252.

²⁴ She was the third lineage holder after her son, Garab Dorje and her brother, Prince Thuwo Rajāhati. Other female lineage holders of the Dzogchen Semde are Nodjyinmo Changchubma (fifth), Metsongma ParTsunma (sixth), Princess Gomadevi (ninth), Metsongma Dagnyidma (thirteenth) and Bhiksuni Kungamo (twentieth), all who lived around the fifth century C.E.

²⁵ Kunjed Gyalpo, *The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of the Dzogchen Semde* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999).

²⁶ Centered around Rewalsar, Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, India

²⁷ Gyalwa Changchub and Namkhai Nyingpo, *Lady of the Lotus-Born: The Life and Enlightenment of Yeshé Tshogyal* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), p. 294. Yeshé Tsogyal is believed to be a reincarnation of the *bodhisattva* Saraswati Devi, a merchant’s daughter who was instrumental in helping Sadaprarudita to gain enlightenment some 2,000 years ago. Keith Dowman, *Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshé Tsogyal* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1996).

²⁸ Bokar Rinpoche, *Tāra The Feminine Divine* (San Francisco: Clear Point Press, 1999), p. 137.

²⁹ Hildegard Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Phagmo of Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

³⁰ According to Powers, “While some orders contend that the practice of sexual yogas with a physical consort (an “action seal”) is not necessary for the attainment of buddhahood and that one may do so through visualizations alone, Gelukpa masters from the time of Tsong Khapa have contended that the subtle physiology of the winds, drops, and channels can only be transmuted into that of an awakened being through yogas involving an actual consort. On the other hand, Gelukpa tradition has tended to reserve such practices to an elite few adepts who have undergone years of rigorous training prior to receiving the instructions of sexual yoga. Most practitioners are advised to remain monks or nuns and to employ meditations in which the consort is imagined, as this is safer and more effective for the vast majority of Buddhists.” Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 493.

³¹ *Sangyum* is an honorific term primarily used to denote the female consort or partner of a lineage master of great accomplishment, who support and engage in the activities of their male consort.

³² This reference to Machig Ongjo as a fully ordained nun (Sanskrit: *bhiksuni*; Tibetan: *gelongma*) in one of the manuscripts is quite significant. Notably, the word *dge slong* is used with the feminine ending *-ma*. Further, this is one of the few pieces of evidence we have that women were receiving (or at least keeping) the complete *bhiksuni* precepts at that time.

³³ Chökyi Dronma was reportedly a fully-ordained nun, ordained by Chokle Namgyel in 1442 at Porong Pelmo Choding Monastery in Tibet.

³⁴ Jetsünma Mingyur Paldron (1699–1769) was the daughter of the *terton* Chogyal Terdag Lingpa and his consort, Phunstok Paldron, herself an emanation of Vajrayoginī. Terdak Lingpa was the founder of Mindrolling Monastery, the main seat of the Nyingmapa School.

³⁵ Jetsün Chime Tenpai Nyima’s father was Ngawang Tutob Wangchuk, the younger brother of Sachen Kunga Lodro (1729–1783), the famed 33rd Sakya Tridzin.

³⁶ Jetsünma Tamdrin Wangmo’s paternal uncle Pema Dudul Wangchuk (1792–1853) was the 33rd Sakya Tridzin. She was also the sister of the 36th Sakya Tridzin (1866 to 1882).

³⁷ Kyabgon Pema Trinle’s father Kunga Nyingpo Sampel Norbu (1850–1899) was the 37th Sakya Tridzin (1883–1899).

³⁸ Anim Choeten Zangmo may be the same person that Tsultrim Wangmo refers to as Chumey Jetsünma Choden Wangmo, also referred to as the great-granddaughter of Terton Pema Lingpa.

³⁹ *De log* are people who come back from the dead and act as messengers of the dead, teaching the value of virtuous actions and the effects of *karma*.

⁴⁰ Some scholars opine that Nangsa Obum was not a historical personality, but a legend.

⁴¹ She may be the same person referred to by Wangmo (2013) as Chumey Jetsünma Choden Wangmo who was also referred to as the great-granddaughter of Tertön Pema Lingpa.

⁴² Some oral accounts suggest that she was the daughter of Tertön Pema Lingpa

⁴³ In earlier time, it was called Brametse (or Bra Cow), because the people of Drametse used to herd many cows.

⁴⁴ Literally means ‘peak without enemy’ which is a state of total freedom from the nets of conception attainable

⁴⁵ The famous drum dance of Drametse is recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible World Heritage for humanity.

⁴⁶ A short account of Tsunma Choeten Zangmo was written by Sangye Wangdi, a former council member from Drametse.

⁴⁷ Note the usage of the word *gelongma* which may indicate a fully-ordained nun in Bhutan, much the same as Machig Ongjo in Tibet.

⁴⁸ Wangmo, *Nunneries of Bhutan*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Note that formal secular education was only introduced in Bhutan in the 1960s. Prior to that, monastic education was the only means of education, which was accessible only to monks. Other than monks, only people from distinguished families had the opportunity to study, though in private.

⁵⁰ Now called the Nalanda Institute for Buddhist Studies, this is a monastic learning institution for monks.

⁵¹ Diemberger, *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty*, p. 18.

The Real Problem Regarding Buddhist Women and Gender Justice: Androcentric Models of Humanity

Rita M. Gross

A significant international Buddhist women's movement has been in place for 35 years. Many advances have been made and people have put forward many proposals about what would improve the situation for Buddhist women. Among the issues most discussed are women's monastic ordination, women as Buddhist leaders and teachers, and bringing lesser-known Buddhist women into the light of history. As one of the earliest commentators on Buddhism and gender, I have begun to feel that we are overlooking the basic problem that causes women's lower status in Buddhism, namely a pre-verbal, pre-reflective, but deeply imbedded ideology that regards men as normal and ideal human beings, and women as less than ideal, an aberration from that norm. Simone de Beauvoir first noticed this problem in her monumental book, *The Second Sex*. Early second-wave feminists called this largely unconscious and pre-reflective assumption "the androcentric model of humanity." We used it extensively in our work and it was important to my analyses in *Buddhism after Patriarchy*.

We analyzed more fully what is entailed in the androcentric model of humanity, which completely dominated society and scholarship when many of us came of age. The literal meaning of this term, "male-centered," clearly demonstrates what the androcentric mode of humanity involves. Males take center stage in descriptions of humanity while women receive much less attention and are fitted in somewhere on the margins. We isolated three results of using the androcentric model of humanity to guide scholarship and thinking. First, the way (white heterosexual) men act and think is made the norm and ideal for all human beings. Despite the universality of gender roles, one standard and one norm are applied to all humans. Because the male norm and the human norm collapse into one, it is assumed that the generic masculine habit of thought, language, and research is adequate – to study males is to study humanity. No special attention need be given to women because they are assumed to be fully covered by the generic masculine. However, second, the result of such research is to erase women from historical records and moral discourses, as has so often happened in Buddhist studies. The results could not be different because gender roles are found in all societies. Women are not part of "generic mankind," no matter how much established scholars proclaimed that one can understand humanity fully without giving any attention to women. But because women are treated differently from men in every religious context, they must eventually be noticed. One cannot gain a complete understanding of Buddhist societies by studying only monks; eventually one must notice that nuns have been part of the sangha, even when they are given low status. But when the pre-reflective, unconscious androcentric model of humanity prevails, women *per se* become an *object* exterior to "mankind" needing to be explained and fitted into the worldview, somewhere on the margins, as an oddity, an extra add-on. That is the third aspect of androcentric research and thinking. In androcentric discourse, women become the "other" to the human subject attempting to understand "his" world (generic masculine intended). They become a problem to be solved, not a co-subject mutually attempting to understand and cope with human sexual differentiation. The otherness of women is an inevitable corollary of the assumption that men are the normal and ideal humans. In this context, it might be good to remember Freud's exasperated question, "What do women want! My god what

do women want!” For starters, we could reply that we want recognition that women are human beings, not an add-on or sub-species.

This early feminist analysis has been largely forgotten in more recent discussions about women and Buddhism. Because we are unaware of the relationship between androcentrism and male dominance, we often work towards being included in Buddhist institutions that, in their current forms, are founded on androcentric presuppositions. We are then working only to be allowed to join the “boys’ club.” Instead, we need to work towards transforming Buddhist institutions into “human clubs.” Genuine equality and freedom for women will never be achieved so long as Buddhist androcentrism prevails. Is it enough to become fully ordained members of an organization that regards all its female members as “lower’ than any male member?

Though male dominance is rooted in androcentrism, androcentrism is much harder to detect and uproot. When deep-seated, undetected, unconscious androcentrism prevails, male dominance easily survives despite its obvious injustice and social destructiveness. Male dominance is blatantly obvious, involving unequal distribution of power and privilege between women and men. For example, a decided social preference for males results in people engaging in abortion for sex selection. Furthermore, men can and do make decisions about and for women without input from women, and largely without regard for women’s needs. Current objections to Buddhist women’s monastic ordination demonstrate male dominance. Male dominance is infuriating, at least to women and men who recognize its artificiality as well as how socially destructive it can be. In situations of male dominance, in order to fortify male swaggering and prop up a superiority that is actually non-existent, the intelligence and talents of women are denied, suppressed, and sacrificed. Women are told that maternity is sufficient for them and should be their only role. Women remain uneducated and are forced into early and perpetual maternity, which is now destroying the planet through serious over-population.

Male dominance can be curtailed or critiqued without truly undercutting androcentrism – the deeply imbedded view that men are normal and ideal – whereas women represent a deviation from that ideal. This happens especially in situations in which some superficial equality between the sexes has been attained, but deep inequalities still prevail and are still considered the norm. One of the most pertinent examples of subtle androcentrism was frequently cited early on in second wave feminism. Numerous studies asked people to identify which characteristics in a long list of traits described the ideal man, the ideal woman, and the ideal human being. Most of the traits were paired opposites, such as active and passive, oriented either to reason or emotion, etc. In all cases, the traits that were said to describe the ideal male also were said to describe the ideal human, but none of the traits chosen to describe the ideal female were considered to be ideal for a human being. It should take only a little reflection to grasp how disempowering and debilitating such stereotypes are for women. Women are socialized to feel and behave in ways that are simply not considered to be ideal for human beings in general, but only for a sub-species within androcentric thinking: women. Nevertheless, it is frequently claimed that women and men are equal in these situations because women can vote, be educated, and have at least some economic independence.

Such superficial equality will not lead to or allow for truly equal achievements. It is difficult to break the glass ceiling when whatever women do is perceived to be not quite right because it does not quite hit the human norm. For example, women in professions are often evaluated as either too passive or too aggressive, but don’t get it “right.” If women are as forthcoming and confident as

successful men usually are, we are evaluated as bitchy ball-busters. But, if we remain more passive and retiring – fulfilling the feminine norm and ideal – we are regarded as easy pushovers who need not be taken seriously, because we do not meet the more forthright behavior seen as appropriate for “normal” human beings! This vicious cycle repeats itself endlessly. Male dominance has been curtailed to some extent, but androcentrism is still as alive and well as ever. Superficial equality co-exists easily with subtle preference for men and maleness, which is, in many ways, even more debilitating for women than more obvious patriarchy.

What is the alternative to the androcentric model of humanity? For years, I have argued for gender neutral and inclusive models of humanity. Such models of humanity would not regard any gender as superior or more ideal. Instead, people of various genders are all regarded as part of the human standard, included as part of the human norm, simply because what they do is how humans behave. This is a very abstract and far-reaching vision, which, paradoxically, asks us to pay much less, not more attention to gender identity. It calls for the opposite of the identity politics on which so much current political activity is based. It calls for a great deal more flexibility of mind, so that we do not make automatic links between a person’s physical appearance and their character, inclinations, interests, or abilities. We would no longer expect women to have an automatic knack for coping with children or men to be sexual initiators. What I am talking about is what I have often called “freedom from the prison of gender roles,” which I have long identified as the true goal of feminism. Many reformers talk of institutionalizing more fair or just gender roles, but the prison of gender roles cannot be fixed. Any new “fairer” set of gender roles will also be a prison for some. Whenever people are forced into certain social roles because of their physical appearance, such practices will cause great harm and suffering, even if those norms conform to averages that do fit the propensities of large numbers of people within a certain group.

What does this have to do with Buddhism? In terms of basic teachings, such as the Four Truths, I have long proclaimed that most of the unnecessary suffering I have experienced in my life – the suffering that results directly from human greed and conventions, rather than from the unalterable realities of “birth old age, sickness, and death” – is due to the prison of gender roles and the supposition that there is some inherent, truly existing link between the shape of my body and what I can accomplish with my precious human life. I have also proclaimed that clinging to some gender identity, as is done by so many Buddhists, subverts enlightenment. Only clinging to gender norms and gender roles could possibly lead people to think that the qualifications for monastic ordination, for example, depend on whether one was born with a penis. Such clinging to gender norms certainly harms those women who are capable of fulfilling the requirements for ordination and would benefit greatly from that lifestyle. But what does it do to those who themselves cling to and enforce these androcentric norms? By holding onto worldly norms and conventions that limit and oppress others, they are harming themselves, both in this life and in future lives. The implications for this life are summed up in the widespread Buddhist assumption that no one is truly free unless all are truly free. Especially for those who believe in future lives, the implications could be serious. If karma means anything, there must be karmic consequences for supporting and benefitting from injustice, even if such practices are commonplace in one’s society. This is only one of countless examples, both within and outside the Buddhist world, of how clinging to gender identity and forcing ourselves and others to live within the prison of gender roles subverts enlightenment and causes grave suffering.

The androcentric model of humanity is tenacious, because it is usually held unconsciously. That is to say, the view of men as the model for humanity is so deeply embedded that people are not even aware they are holding it. As a result, alternatives, such as the claim that this view is inaccurate and causes suffering, strike people as absurd when they first hear them. They often respond in one of two ways. Either they say, “I don’t regard men as superior to women. This is just the way I talk. It doesn’t mean anything that I always use generic masculine language.” Or they say, “But of course men must be deferred to and allowed to lead. That’s just natural.” In this regard, the unconscious view that the generic masculine is normal and natural is very similar to our unconsciously held view that, of course, we have a permanent abiding self. We hold onto the androcentric model of humanity in much the same way we hold onto our egoistic views – very deeply and largely without any awareness for how erroneous these views are or of how much suffering they cause. The deep similarity between the way egoistic views and androcentric models of humanity function should give pause to Buddhists, especially those who are deeply committed to the truth of egolessness. In fact, I do not see how one can reject views of egoism and at the same time cling to views of androcentrism. The attempt to do so leads to the absurd view that egolessness is gendered – something I have articulated in other works.

One of the oldest and most cogent Buddhist analogies talks about ignorance as a deeply rooted weed. Anyone who knows anything about gardening (and I am an experienced gardener) knows that cutting off the top or the branches of a weed does little to uproot it. The garden’s appearance may be superficially improved for a short time, but the problematic plant will quickly re-grow if its root is still intact. Buddhists have no trouble equating the weed with egoistic tendencies and understanding the importance of uprooting it. Superficially believing in egolessness might be comparable to cutting off the top of the weed, leaving the root to send up new leaves and branches. Deeper disciplines and more work will be needed to uproot ego. In so far as ego is bound with taking gender identity with great seriousness, we need to uproot our allegiance to our gender identity to get rid of the root of ego. In uprooting egoistic tendencies, it will also be necessary to root out the view that men are normal, ideal human beings and women are not.

Given how deeply rooted the androcentric model of humanity is in Buddhist consciousness and Buddhist institutions, it is important to identify some of its most forceful manifestations in Buddhist discourse and practice. We should then become as disciplined in our attempts to uproot the androcentric model of humanity as we are in our attempts to uproot egoistic tendencies. Unfortunately, here I can only note some of the most blatant manifestations of androcentrism. Discussing them more adequately will have to wait for another opportunity.

First, androcentrism manifests in the continued use of generic masculine language. This is probably androcentrism’s most powerful tool, at least for English language speakers. I do not understand why people cling so fiercely to words such as “mankind” when more acceptable alternatives such as “humanity” are so readily available. Yet such usage is common in English-language Buddhist liturgies – something I have battled my entire Buddhist life. In some liturgies, the term “son,” a clearly masculine word, is used to stand for all practitioners, even in especially crucial contexts. These linguistic practices clearly reveal many unconscious presuppositions about who are real and worthy human beings, and simply intensify the acceptability of discriminating against women in Buddhist institutions.

Second, much Buddhist visual imagery conveys the impression that men are the real human

beings, while women are merely accessories or accomplices. It is very common to walk into a Buddhist shrine room or meditation hall that is completely devoid of female imagery, although there are numerous representations of male teachers and Buddhas. Androcentric impressions are also evident in some Tibetan and Vajrayana images, commonly known as the “*yab-yum*” icon, in which the couple is portrayed in ways that make the female partner melt into the male partner. Often, she becomes almost invisible or unnoticeable to the viewer, and she loses her autonomous visibility. It reminds one of the common Western wedding phrase “and the two become one flesh,” which is often followed by the supposition that the female’s “flesh” is erased into his “one flesh.”

Finally, even in Buddhist women’s circles, talk of an essentialist “feminine principle” is becoming more common. These views often turn on a dualistic opposition between masculinity and femininity, along with the assertion that women have a special relationship with femininity or the feminine principle and manifest it more directly than do men. Sometimes it is claimed that both women and men can demonstrate both masculinity and femininity. Some women find such discourse comforting because it often says much more positive things about femininity than we are used to hearing in patriarchal discourse. Nevertheless, labeling some human traits as “feminine” and others as “masculine” makes me quite uncomfortable. Often, it is only a prettier version of the prison of gender roles. Gender essentialist discourse that divides human qualities into “masculine” and “feminine” qualities cannot be liberating, in my view, but easily brings the prison of gender roles in its wake almost immediately.

I do not believe that it is possible to transcend the androcentric model of humanity with less than thorough-going measures than avoiding generic masculine language, or visual images that elevate males over females, or even the tendency to label some human traits as “masculine” and others as “feminine.” If the androcentric model of humanity continues to hold sway, overcoming the results of male dominance and patriarchy, such as refusal to ordain Buddhist women as monastics or promote women equally as teachers, is quite unlikely. I, also, argue that if Buddhists – both men and women – understood more clearly that men are not more normal or ideal human beings than women, many of the specific institutional problems women face would fade away. They would fade away because such practices only make sense if the view that men are more normal representatives of humanity than women is deeply in place.

Leaving Family Behind: Lessons of Love and Loss from the Buddha's Hagiography

Vanessa R. Sasson

For more than a decade, I have focused on the Buddha's lifestory in my research. I have examined particular scenes in his hagiography in depth, have compared them, analysed them, and written about them, and while this may not sound particularly exciting to everyone, the truth is that this specialization has granted me the continuing privilege of seeing the Buddha's story in an entirely new light on a regular basis.

For most of my academic career, I have therefore focused on the Buddha himself. All the other characters in his life are stored in the background of my imagination by comparison. Recently, however, I decided to change my lens and look more closely at those he left behind when he made his Great Departure. In most Buddhist communities today, there is an implicit expectation that the Buddha, as a Buddha, could never have caused anyone harm – a natural expectation given the fact that the very definition of Buddhahood is associated with the elimination of suffering. But before the Buddha became a Buddha, he made his Great Departure. And in that moment, he abandoned everyone who depended on him.

I am assuming that this is not news to any of you, but what has struck me as being worthy of emphasis is the fact that countless hagiographies the world over make this point an explicit part of the narrative. The Bodhisattva was called to the religious life and this initially devastated almost everyone around him. Most texts do not hide this fact under a blanket of philosophical justification. On the contrary – so much of the literature accepts the simple fact that when he left, he broke everyone's heart. It is this point that I want to bring to your attention today.

Let us begin with the Buddha's father – King Suddhodana. As we all know, the King was warned not long after his birth that his son might choose to become a religious leader instead of a king. This was terrifying to him. Suddhodana needed his son to become a king, not a monk, so he decided to imprison his son with luxury and he shielded him from the reality of suffering. Twenty-nine years later, however, the Prince shattered this glass prison anyway and walked away.

Some texts describe the Prince as leaving without saying goodbye, while others record a painful discussion between father and son. One of the most beautiful descriptions of such a discussion is, in my opinion, found in Ashvaghosa's 1st century poem, the *Buddhacarita*. Here, the Prince approaches his father and asks, "Kindly grant me permission... to gain release. I desire the wandering life..." (BC 5. 28).¹ His father begins to shake, "like a tree struck down by an elephant," and choking with tears, he begs his son to reconsider the request. The fear he had been nurturing for twenty-nine years – the fear that his son would leave – is suddenly ripening into reality. He tells his son that the homeless life is not appropriate at his age, that it is too lonely and that the senses are too strong, but the Prince does not waver. So the King adds that it is his *own* time to seek the dharma. His son is overturning the natural order of things. He – the King – is supposed to hand over the throne and walk away; not his son!

The Prince's calling is too strong, even for this argument. He declares that, unless the King can promise that he will never suffer old age, sickness or death and that he will never lose his fortune, he must go. This request shocks the King and he begs his son for an alternative option, but the Prince refuses. Siddhartha declares emphatically,

Don't hold me back, for it is not right to obstruct a man who is trying to escape from a burning house. (BC 5.40).

There is simply no way to stop him from going forth.

Although the King has no arguments left to give, his heart is not at peace. The *Buddhacarita* describes him as ordering all the gates locked and inundating his son with even more sensual delights and beautiful courtesans. In this way, the King reveals himself to be the one who is actually imprisoned – not his son – for he is imprisoned by fear, whereas his son is breaking free.

Indeed, even after his son makes his Great Departure, the King holds on. The *Buddhacarita* describes him as sending messengers to the forest to find him and bring him home. The message he sends includes agonizing words of heartbreak. It says,

I know that you have resolved to follow dharma, and I realize this will be your future goal, but I am burnt up by this fire, the fire of grief, for you have gone to the forest at the wrong time (BC 9.14).

The Prince asked his father to leave because the worldly life felt like a burning house to him. What the King does not realize is that he is choosing to stay in the burning house and he is being burned alive by the grief of being left behind. The father is lost in *samsara* while the son walks away.

Another grief-stricken character is the Buddha's wife, whom I will call Yasodhara (although she is also sometimes known as Bimba, Gopa, or Rahulamata). In many hagiographies throughout the centuries, Yasodhara's loss is described as particularly acute. The *Jatakas* repeatedly identify Yasodhara as having been the Bodhisattva's wife in past lives, thereby highlighting the intimate bond they shared for generations, and according to the *Buddhavamsa* commentary, the two of them were born at exactly the same moment in their final rebirths.² The link between Yasodhara and the Buddha is thus presented as powerful and long-standing. When he makes the Great Departure in their last life together, the loss is profound for her. What she cannot understand is why he did not take her with him when he left.

Ranjini Obeyesekere produced a wonderful book on this literature a few years ago. Entitled *Yasodhara, the Wife of the Bodhisattva*,³ Obeyesekere provides translations of Sinhala folk poetry and notes that sections of these, in which Yasodhara laments her loss, were often sung at village funerals as songs of loss.⁴ Yasodhara is presented as utterly heart-broken when she discovers that her beloved husband has gone. For example, in one section she pounces on Channa the chariot-driver like a lioness and demands him to tell her where her husband went. When no answer ensues, she mourns her pain and says,

You left resolved, your mind set on being a Buddha. I too made a firm resolve to be always your wife. We made our joint resolves and you gave me your hand. Why then did you leave today without a word? (48).

Yasodhara later recalls their past lives together when he was Prince Vessantara and she was his wife, and she asks,

Did I not look after you then?... Like the marks on the moon, was I not with you always?... Why then did you leave me and walk away? (49-50).

Yasodhara does not question the ideal of renunciation. What she cannot understand is why he did not take her with him when he left. They had shared everything together for lifetimes. When the Bodhisattva made the Great Departure without her, she experiences it as a betrayal of the highest order. She tears off her royal clothes, her silks and jewels and the rings on her toes, and sits on the floor, “lifeless, as if turned to stone” (51).

This kind of depiction of Yasodhara’s pain is not limited to Sinhala folk literature. Similar descriptions appear in various early sources from the *Buddhacarita* onwards, and continuing well into the present. The *Sugata Saurabha*, for example – a 20th century Nepali poem about the Buddha’s life – goes into similar heart-breaking detail. In this poem, Yasodhara returns to the gardens she once enjoyed with her husband and reminisces at every spot where they had once been together. She remembers a pair of geese on the pond that they had watched together. She walks over to the pond’s edge and looks into the water, but does not see her husband’s reflection beside her as she had that day. She stares at herself alone, devastated. She walks over to the fruit trees and remembers all the things he had whispered in her ear as they collected oranges. The poem then gives voice to her anger when it says of her,

Sunk into the burning furnace of separation, who can save the life of a heart-broken heroine?
The full-moon tried by spreading its icy-cold hands with loving care, but its hands were burnt
[by her anger]. Look how the moon’s face is spotted with black burn marks. Seeing the
beauty of a maiden missing her beloved distant husband to be like the sea, the moon might
have come to bathe in it, but today if it had spread its hands out in the autumn night, she
might just have spit in [the moon’s] face (SS 163).⁵

There are many more examples of this nature in which Yasodhara’s pain is highlighted after her husband’s departure. As one last example, consider the words of Hira Bansode, a famous *dalit* poet from Maharashtra:

He was moving toward a great splendor, far from the place you lay...
He went, he conquered, he shone.
While you listened to the songs of his triumph
Your womanliness must have wept.
You who lost husband and son must have felt uprooted like the tender banana plant.⁶

Although Yasodhara eventually did come to terms with the loss and followed her husband into a life of renunciation, when she first learned that he was gone, literature the world over recognizes that she was in pain.

Such experiences are not limited to the human beings in the Buddha’s life. Consider the brief description provided by the *Jatakanidana* about Kanthaka’s response to his master leaving. Kanthaka was the Bodhisattva’s magnificent horse who galloped him out of the palace on the day of the Great Departure. Almost in passing, the *Jatakanidana* notes that when Kanthaka overhears the

conversation between the Bodhisattva and Channa while at the edge of the forest and he realizes that they are both being sent away, Kanthaka “was unable to endure the grief at the thought that he would no longer be able to see his master. And going out of their sight, he died broken hearted” (JN 65).⁷ Channa, the chariot driver, also experiences the departure as a personal abandonment. The text continues that after losing his master and also his horse, the pain becomes overwhelming: “At first, Channa had only one cause for sorrowing, but with Kanthaka’s death he was overcome by a second sorrow, and he returned to the city weeping and lamenting” (JN 65).

As all of these examples make clear, the Bodhisattva’s Great Departure was not an emotionally neutral event for those left behind. He broke everyone’s heart the day he left for a life of renunciation and the texts are not even subtle about it. On the contrary, texts from every corner of the Buddhist world and from every generation recognize that the Bodhisattva caused suffering too. When he made his Great Departure, those left behind are rarely described as celebrating the moment joyfully. On the contrary, their attachment to him makes it hard for them to let him go.

When we think about it, none of this is surprising. *Of course* everyone was pained by the loss of him. How could it be any other way? What impresses me about this feature of his story, however, is that the tradition does not pretend otherwise. The tradition could have shielded the Buddha from any association with *dukkha*, but it did not. Just as the Bodhisattva needed to see *dukkha* for himself if he was ever to be inspired to leave home, so did everyone else. Of course, the faithful Buddhist interpreter will at this point jump in and say that the only reason his father, his wife, his chariot driver and his horse (among others) experienced suffering at his departure is because they were entrenched in *samsaric* attachment. *He* did not cause their suffering; their own minds did.

This is obvious, of course, but it remains nevertheless heroic to me that the tradition keeps to its own ideals in the various tellings of his life, thereby reminding its audience that even the Buddha – when he was a Bodhisattva – faced resistance when he made his decision to leave home and change his life. When we have important decisions to take and we meet resistance as a response, we can take heart.

NOTES

¹ English translation used here is: Ashvaghosa, *Life of the Buddha*. Translated by Patrick Olivelle. Clay Sanskrit Library (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

² BvA 131. For an English translation, see *The Clarifier of the Sweet Meaning (Madhurattavilasini)*. Translation by I. B. Horner (London: Pali Text Society, 1978).

³ Ranjini Obeyesekere, *Yasodhara, the Wife of the Bodhisattva: The Sinhala Yasodharavata (The Story of Yasodhara) and the Sinhala Yasodharapadanaya (The Sacred Biography of Yasodhara)* (New York: SUNY, 2009).

⁴ Obeyesekere, 15.

⁵ For the English translation, see Chittadhar Hridaya, *Sugata Saurabha: An Epic Poem from Nepal on the Life of the Buddha*. Translated by Todd Lewis and Subarna Man Tuladhar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ See Eleanor Zelliot, “Buddhist Women of the Contemporary Maharashtrian Buddhist Movement,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*. Edited by José Ignacio Cabezon (New York: SUNY, 1992), 104.

⁷ For an English translation, see *The Story of Gotama Buddha (Jātaka-nidāna)*. Translation by N. A. Jayawickrama (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2002).

Compassion and Social Engagement: Interdependent Paradigms for Vietnamese Buddhist Women

Thich Nu Nhu Nguyet

During his lifetime, the Buddha accepted nuns into the *sangha* and recognized that they had the same potential as men to achieve liberation, which has transformed the lives of women ever since. From the time that Buddhism was introduced in Vietnam, it has continued to grow, contributing significantly to the lives of people of all social backgrounds. Buddhism nurtured the spiritual potential of all and was embraced enthusiastically by women. Using that spiritual strength, women helped Buddhism become deeply rooted, both as a religion and as a practice for daily life. Up to the present day, the Buddhist teachings continue to help women face whatever challenges they face. In line with these objectives, here I wish to explore the ways in which women in Vietnam and elsewhere can become empowered through social engagement in ways that ultimately facilitate their progress on the path to liberation.

In the spirit of Sakyadhita, which serves as a bridge connecting women all over the world, I intend to document an example of the integrated practice of compassion and social engagement that is currently widespread among Buddhist women in Vietnam. In this paper, I investigate the integrated practice of compassion and social engagement through the life of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen, the head of Lam Quang Temple in Ho Chi Minh City, and her work of caring for the elderly. After briefly introducing Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and Lam Quang Pagoda, I will focus on the daily activities of the temple and the care the temple provides for elderly women. In the latter part of the paper, I include some reflections shared by some of the women living in the temple. In the future, I hope to continue this line of research at some of the many other temples where women are actively engaged in similar social welfare activities.

Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen

The life of Thich Nu Hue Tuyen (Le Ngoc Lich) is a special story. She was born on February 23, 1964, in Ho Chi Minh City, into a family of seven brothers and sisters. All her family members became disciples of the Buddha; her four brothers became monks and she and her two sisters and mother became nuns. When she was five years old, due to family circumstances, she was sent to stay at a temple. There, Bhiksu Thuong Tu Ha Bach, the abbot of An Phú Pagoda, accepted her as his disciple. While she was staying at her master's temple, little Ngoc Lich had a chance to witness the way her master cared for the sick and elderly monks at the temple and to experience the love he showed them. In that environment, she vowed to follow the path of a nun and to look after frail, incapacitated, and ill elderly people. One day when we were talking together, she shared her thoughts:

“At that time, I just thought that I was being sent to stay at a temple with my grandmother or uncle, without any understanding of the terms ‘cultivation and practice.’ It was predestined that I went to that temple when I was five years old. As a person with a compassionate heart in the loving atmosphere of the temple, seeing the way my master looked after the old

monks, I felt that I wanted to pursue this kind of work, too. I have engaged in this work for 20 years now.”

The seeds of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen’s religious life and her dedication to caring for lonely, elderly people were thus sown when she was just a small girl. After many years of living in the temple, growing up with the teachings of the Buddha, with the voice of the temple bell and the guidance and help of a compassionate master, Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen chose the way of looking after the lonely and debilitated elders as her path of spiritual cultivation. She practiced “double cultivation,” that is, she cultivated both her mind and her body, contributing to the welfare of human beings and directly liberating them from suffering. In the course of time, she also completed the basic and advanced courses in Buddhist studies at Vinh Nghiem Temple.

In 1995, Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen was appointed by the Executive Committee of Ho Chi Minh City Buddhist Sangha to be the abbess of Lam Quang Temple. Since then, she has been able to receive many homeless, elderly women at her temple and help improve conditions for them. Over the past 20 years, Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples at the temple have never tired of their work, because they all understand it as the fulfillment of their vows of take care of these unfortunate women, drying the painful tears on their faces.

Lâm Quang Temple: A Forest of Light

Lâm Quang Temple is located in Ward 14, District 8, Ho Chi Minh City. The name of the temple, Lâm Quang, literally means “forest of light.” Although the temple is located in a hidden corner of the district, it is always full of light – the light of compassionate hearts – always illuminating the dark corners of myriad miserable lives. Tucked away on a small pathway in a poor neighborhood, the exact location of the temple is not easy to find. It is built and appointed in a very simple, even nondescript style. In the past, it was even smaller and in even worse repair; with a low foundation and an old tile roof, it was often flooded everywhere. In the rainy season, Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples often had to divide their time between taking care of the elderly and repairing the temple. In the end, almost all the temple’s resources were used to take care of the elderly.

After some time, more and more people heard about the noble work of the temple. Gradually, many philanthropists wished to contribute to the work of the temple and helped to repair and expand the buildings, until the temple took its present shape. A new block of rooms was built especially to accommodate the increasing numbers of elderly people who came to the temple.

Daily Activities at Lam Quang Temple

At Lam Quang Temple, there are three types of rooms. The first type of room is reserved for relatively healthy elderly women; the second type is reserved for the weaker ones; and the third type is for the very weak ones, who cannot move and need bed care. Currently, the temple is looking after around 150 elderly women. One third of the women are very old and weak or disabled, unable to look after themselves. Many of the women have to lie in bed all day and have neurological problems. However, anyone who visits them will clearly see that these elderly, ill women live in a loving

atmosphere. In this haven, they are taken care of, they can share their life experiences, and have a chance to pray and chant with a contented heart. This is a place where they can leave their burdens behind and forget about the miserable episodes that they have had to endure.

To continually provide care for such a large number of elderly women, a big budget is required. Therefore, in the beginning, Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples had to weave mats to sell to support themselves. They also made incense and prepared vegetarian meals in order to raise money. Thanks to the efforts of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples, and the donations offered by Buddhist followers and philanthropists, the lives of the elderly women at Lam Quang Temple have greatly improved recently. She has sent two of her disciples to medical school to learn how to provide professional medical care for the residents. Now that these two disciples have graduated, they are very helpful in looking after the residents at the temple.

Difficulties and Challenges

Conditions at Lam Quang Temple have improved markedly over the last ten years. Still, the nuns and residents continue to face many difficult challenges. Providing skilled care for 150 helpless, elderly women is not a simple task. Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples have to be very patient and strong-minded. The first difficulty is the lack of sufficient human resources. There are very few nuns at the temple – only eight. Though a group of volunteers and some good neighbors help out, they cannot come to the temple every day. So Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her nun disciples are constantly busy attending to the needs of the residents. At night, she herself makes sure that the women are comfortable and safely asleep. She checks to see whether anyone is lacking a blanket and whether the lights have been left on in any of the rooms. When she has made sure that all the women under her charge are resting peacefully, only then does she go to sleep.

The selfless efforts of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples are well known in the community and have been recognized by the government. Still, it is very difficult for the nuns to share the many challenges they face in caring for the elderly women under their care. The residents are not only given food and shelter, but also Dharma teachings. At the temple, they are better cared for than they have been by their own families. The elderly often feel lonely and homesick, especially those who have no children or relatives. The women staying at Lam Quang Temple do not suffer as much as they might otherwise, though, because of the loving kindness they receive. Understandably, the women consider Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples to be living *bodhisattvas*.

Ordinarily, people want their good deeds to be known to others. But Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples do not want to tell people about their noble work. Recently, reporters have come to know about the activities of the temple and have publicized them to the community. But what they have learned and broadcast is just a fraction of the nuns' good work. It is difficult to imagine all the difficulties that these noble caregivers have to cope with every day. Taking care of the elderly is difficult enough, but taking care of those who are ill is even more difficult. Medicine for the women is very costly. Preparing food for them is also a challenge, because many of them cannot take solid food and many cannot feed themselves. In addition, the nuns need to care for the residents when they die. Sometimes several residents pass away in one day and the temple has to manage all the funeral costs, which is no trivial matter.

Reflections of the Elderly Residents at the Temple

The old women who are fortunate enough to be cared for by the nuns of Lam Quang Temple feel very peaceful, happy, and content. They are very grateful for the loving care that Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and the other *bhikkhunis* provide every day. A resident named Đào Thi Vui, who is from Kien Giang Province, shared her thoughts: “This year, I turned 88 years old. I came to Lam Quang Temple four years ago. Earlier, I had to work for others in order to make ends meet. I have no family, no children. Now I am very weak and unable to work for a living. I feel very lucky that an acquaintance introduced me to this temple.”

Tu Thi Duc, a 77-year-old woman from Long An Province, told me, “When I was 18 years old, I lost my parents. I had to go to the city to work as a tailor. Eventually my health did not permit me to continue working. Once, while I was sewing, I had a stroke. Disease and old age took all my savings. I had to spend even my last few coins. Another patient at the hospital where I was being treated was aware of my situation and brought me to this temple. Two years have passed since then. Under the care of the nuns at the temple, with the medicines they provided, I have gradually recovered and can now walk.”

A woman named Thach Thi Xâm, who is 90 years old, told me another very touching story: “One morning, I asked Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen, ‘Please allow me to go for a walk and get some exercise.’ While taking a walk, I stumbled and fell, and broke my knee bone. Some passers-by stopped and a man had to carry me back to the temple. I was taken to Sùng Chính Hospital. The doctors there said that, because I am over 80 years old, it is not possible to reset my bones. I was in great pain from my injuries. Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen saw the pain I was in and could not bear it. She took me to hospital again to replace my joints with stainless steel, which cost about VND 60 million (nearly USD3,000). I was given VND 60 million to reset my broken bones. I choked up with gratitude for the great compassion the master showed to me. I think that the master will definitely become a Buddha.”

Concluding Remarks

At Lam Quang Temple, a small community of nuns looks after a large number of elderly women – more than 150, at present. Over the past 20 years, the temple has received an even larger number and has already said farewell to many of them. Sometimes, two or three people pass away in one day. People say that these are “happy endings” or “fortunate closures,” because many people arrive at the temple after living hard lives and enduring harsh circumstances. At Lam Quang Temple, they can spend their last days in a loving, compassionate, and peaceful environment.

The Buddha taught us to do good deeds without thinking about the fruits of our actions. Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and the *bhikkhunis* at Lam Quang Temple never intended to tell anyone about their hard work and the difficulties they face in the process of caring for the elderly. Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen has so many heavy responsibilities; it is not easy to even get to see her. However, as the saying goes, “good wine needs no bush.” This Vietnamese proverb means that the fragrance of a beautiful flower naturally reaches far and wide. It suggests that if you do good deeds, people will know naturally know about them; you do not have to inform them. Gradually, however, the noble work of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples has become known to the community and the

government, and is well recognized.¹ Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen has not only accumulated great merit through her compassionate activities, she has also received many awards honoring her valuable contributions to society, including commendations from the People's Committee of District 8 and from the chair of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee. The recognition that she has received shows that actions always speak louder than words. If Buddhist nuns and laywomen express their compassion in selfless service, their actions will surely be well recognized by society. This is the spirit of the Buddha's teaching philosophy and evidence of the law of cause and effect.

According to the philosophy of the Buddha, a *bodhisattva* perfects six virtues (*paramitas*): generosity, morality, patience, joyful effort, concentration, and wisdom. Generosity, or giving, such as doing charitable deeds, is the very first *bodhisattva* principle. This idea was expressed in Bhikkhu Khantipalo's book, *A History of Buddhism in Australia*, published in 1989. At a meeting of a Buddhist organization that he attended, people argued fiercely from 8 am to 11 pm. Most surprising of all, no one at the meeting was even given a cup of water during that time. Having lived for many years in Thailand, a country where people are very hospitable, Bhikkhu Khantipalo was very surprised by this heartlessness. According to the Buddhist teachings, all methods of cultivating the mind start with generosity, the compassionate act of giving. If the very simple principle of giving is not part of the religious life, people can hardly expect to achieve enlightenment by any other method.

Everybody who is born in this world has his or her own sufferings and everybody wishes to be cared for by others. But only those with truly compassionate hearts are able to forget their own sufferings, open their hearts to others, and try to remove others' sufferings. When we think of the work that Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples at Lam Quang Temple have done, and continue to do, we cannot help but be impressed by their compassion as an example of the "magic" of life. The compassion and extraordinary social engagement of Bhiksuni Hue Tuyen and her disciples has helped turn a small, nondescript temple into a warm and loving home for countless homeless, helpless old women. Their compassionate activities show us the true Dharma.

NOTES

¹ Reporters from many popular newspapers, magazines (such as *Tuoi Tre*, a magazine for youth), and TV channels (such as the channel operated by the People's Police and Viettoday) in Vietnam have come to the temple to conduct interviews for news reports and films about the activities of the temple. These news reports and films have provided much useful information for this paper.

Mahakaruna of Prajnaparamita: The Divine Feminine and Compassionate Activism in the 21st Century

Neela Bhattacharya Saxena

I pray to Prajnaparamita, the wisdom personified in the great view of the Buddha, as the savior, mother of all the Buddhas of all times.

It is perhaps a sign of the times that Buddhism, women, and feminism are playing a major role in global scenarios. Exhaustion from domineering patriarchal religious traditions that have contributed to the current planetary crisis of wholesale degradation of all things marked “female” is being felt in many sectors of human society. In order to halt the self-destructive ways of a grasping consumer culture that turns the earth and its people into commodities, we need to affirm the world and yet not cling to its ways. This global gathering of the daughters of the Buddha is issuing a clarion call for compassionate action. Prajnaparamita, the great Mahayana archetype of enlightenment, seems to be central in this endeavor. This call is based on an ancient crystal-clear awareness of reality that is centered on profound and non-sentimental values of nurturing, with a view to ending the suffering of all living beings.

This paper looks at this great female Buddhist archetype to show how the presence of the divine feminine in one’s psycho-spiritual makeup may lead to a natural (*sahaja*) understanding of human beings’ relationship to the external world. The sacred female figures of tantric Buddhist traditions provide diamond clarity and give women the conviction and courage to act with deep compassion, without any puritanical fear and loathing of “woman” that may be associated with other worldly religious goals. A woman who either perceives herself as inferior or identifies with a reified “womanhood” will miss a profound opportunity to identify with the pristine awareness of Prajnaparamita. Generating an awakened identity frees her from the rigid and circumscribed “self” that keeps her tethered to dualistic thinking and suffering.

Perhaps nothing has been more damaging to women’s active spirituality than the denigration of the body and senses as conceived in a dualistic metaphysics, whether Western or Asian. Speculative, abstract, and androcentric religious ways often create fantasies around a transcendental male God figure who stands outside of creation, inhabiting a perfect heaven that provides an escape from impermanence. In such efforts to escape the aging and dying body, spiritual abodes have been imagined as an escape from “woman” and her birth-giving capacity. Such conceptions create a perpetually conflict-ridden atmosphere and an ignorant, extreme consumption of the body of the earth, including the oppression of everything female and gentle. In a world beset by such destructive tendencies, Dharma practices that focus on notions of a divine feminine may lead to a reenvisioning of the world that avoids falling into its sexist traps.

Often people are perplexed by the inclusion of deities in a non-theistic tradition like Buddhism. The association of tantra with sexuality creates even more confusion. In her 1996 book, *Feminism and Religion*, Rita Gross put this succinctly into perspective: “...Tantric or Vajrayana forms of Buddhism have long been derided by both from Western scholars and other Buddhists, in part because of the presence of strong, sexually active female sacred beings. They confuse those who do not expect to find deities in Buddhism at all, they scandalize people who assume that sexuality and the sacred can have nothing to do with each other, and they mystify people who assume that the

divine and the feminine should be remote from each other.”¹

A long history of imperial and monotheistic readings of Indic traditions has also clouded our understanding of tantric traditions, but fortunately things have changed. Practicing Western scholars have begun to see the problem inherent in using a lens that is incompatible with what I have described as a “Gynocentric” tantra, a radical worldview.² In *The Tantric View of Life*, Herbert Guenther attributes the Western misunderstanding of tantra to its “preoccupation with control and domination” and criticizes writers who “could not understand that the desire to realize Being is not the same as the craving for power.”³ Indic paths have posited freedom from one’s conditioned shackles as their ultimate goal. In Hindu *moksha* and Buddhist *nirvana*, liberation is valued over a heaven. It is not incidental that, despite socio-economic patriarchy, Indic religious texts and traditions retain this profoundly Gynocentric matrix. The texts of the mature flowering of tantra illustrate practical ways of realizing the suchness (*tathata*) of freedom and use considerable female imagery.

This exuberant celebration of the feminine has been a hallmark of all tantric paths in the Dharma traditions. Keith Dowman argues: “In the mature efflorescence of Indian spiritual genius Buddhism assimilated the cult of the Mother Goddess; in the Buddhist Tantra mysticism and magic, ritual and incantation, characterize the path of the yogin who does not abandon the senses and emotions but uses them as the means to attain Buddhahood during his [sic] lifetime.”⁴ My guru, Kulavadhuata Satpurananda, says that “Yoginis and Dakinis are Bodhisattvas who help in and through Compassion the seekers and practitioners who aspire in the Path of Wisdom.” In his foreword to *Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshe Tsogyel*, Trinley Norbu Rinpoche also cites “the profound sutra system” where “the Dakini is called the great Mother”:

Indescribable, unimaginable Perfection of Wisdom,
Unborn, unobstructed essence of sky,
She is sustained by self-awareness alone:
I bow down before the Great Mother of the Victorious Ones, past, present and future.

An identification with Prajnaparamita, the enlightened feminine, may lead to a natural flow of compassionate activism. As one begins to awaken to one’s spontaneous (*sahaja*) nature, one may imagine a sustainable future for humanity. As the ground of all being, Prajnaparamita embodies both wisdom and compassion and is complete in herself. Compassionate action can arise when we identify with the Great Mother’s profound power to generate and nourish.

There is a fascinating paradox in the understanding of a Divine Mother figure of Indic traditions. She represents the archetypal feminine and yet being free of monotheistic essentialism, she is beyond the constraints of biological determinism and gender binaries. Subhuti sings infinite praises of the perfection of wisdom: “She is utterly unstained, because nothing in this insubstantial world can possibly stain her. She is an ever flowing fountain of incomparable light, and from every conscious being on every plane of being, she removes the faintest trace of illusory darkness.” Lex Hixon writes that

This mother, matrix, guide, power and bliss of all Buddhas and their embryonic forms, the bodhisattvas, is not simply tender and nurturing in some stereotypical sense of the feminine.

Mother Prajnaparamita expresses her mystic motherhood equally and more centrally as the uncompromising discipline of transcendent insight. A union of inexhaustible tenderness and diamond clarity that is like open space radiates from this Sutra as the strong feminine voice of Prajnaparamita....”⁵

In the deep structure of adamant wisdom in the Buddhist tradition are teachings describing the primordial awareness of emptiness. The tantric tradition builds on the pan-Indic understanding of the divine feminine to speak of emptiness as the womb from which the duality of male and female, compassion (*karuna*) and skillful means (*upaya*) emerge. This understanding of emptiness is vital in women and men’s spiritual lives. Without recognizing this “Gynocentric matrix” of Indic traditions, we miss the profound relevance that a figure such as Prajnaparamita symbolically holds for female practitioners. When the empty nature of the self is understood, it can act in ways that are not clouded by any ideology.

It is not easy to express emptiness and its profound fullness. In *Glimpses of Space: The Feminine Principle and Evam*, Chogyam Trungpa explains how the ungraspable nature of reality is the mother principle: “Becoming, or femininity, is very intangible. ... if you resort back to tantric attitudes and ideas of feminine principle, you end up seeing everything as a real world that you cannot grasp. That seems to be the essence of the feminine principle – that real world that you cannot grasp.”⁶ He clarifies the connection between space and the feminine principle in his notion of Evam where the dualities of feminine and masculine emerge and merge, with the feminine representing space, freedom, and oxygen. He explains how “the compassion aspect of the bodhisattva relates with both E and Vam principles, simultaneously and together....the E principle is karuna, basic compassion; and the VAM principle...is maitri, the warmth and loving, the domestic aspect of it.”⁷

Once a daughter of the Buddha (*sakyadhita*) sees this deep unity between polarities, she can give birth to her own ungraspable nature and act in the world. Judith Simmer Brown recalls how, in his talks, Rinpoche wove in the unborn and unceasing mother who “safeguards against the development of ego’s impulses.” Brown recognized that this cannot be grasped conceptually.⁸ Only meditation practices that dissolve the illusion of a separate self into the vastness of spatial awareness can lead to the recognition of our inseparability with the primordial mother. In the *shakta* tradition this primordial mother is known as Adyakali, the one who is beyond all polarities. Concrete images of the goddesses help avoid the abstracting and analyzing impulse of the intellect, so that we can melt into the warmth of her womb.

In the vast history of tantric Buddhist discourse, great pains were taken to clarify *shunyata* that is not a nihilistic nothingness. Using the metaphor of the womb, with its great potentiality for birthing awakened beings, was one of the skillful means utilized by the master teachers. Once again, this requires becoming comfortable with the paradox of polarities giving birth to a spontaneous flow of compassion toward all. In *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra*, Taigen Dan Leighton speaks of “the striking story of myriad bodhisattvas springing forth from the open space under the ground.”⁹ He discusses the prevalence of womb images in words such as *tathagatgarbha*, *khstigarbha*, and *akasagarbha*. Citing the *Srimala Sutra* on *tathagatagarbha*, he writes that “this womb of the buddhas is the basis, support, and foundation of the world of samsara, the conditioned realm of suffering.”¹⁰

To think that this has nothing to do with real women will miss the mark. Rita Gross discovered why the *tantras* forbid any denigration of women: “[W]omen are not to be denigrated because of women’s true nature – ‘the nature of wisdom,’ and ‘the symbol of wisdom and Sunyata, showing both.’.... this declaration goes further in stating that physical human women actually incarnate or embody that wisdom, as well as *shunyata* ...”¹¹ Guru Rinpoche addresses Yeshe Tsogyel, saying,

O yogini who has mastered the Tantra,
The human body is the basis of the accomplishment of wisdom
And the gross bodies of men and women are equally suited,
But if a woman has strong aspiration, she has higher potential.¹²

Today Mindrolling Khandro, regarded as an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyel, often repeats this dictum. But women under patriarchy do not know that or may easily fall prey to internalizing the projected inferiority or its opposite, aggressive androcentricism.

My vajra guru effortlessly epitomizes this “Gynocentric” Indian view. He talks about the lyrics of the Bauls, where woman is the embodiment of bliss, and says: “The metaphor of the male realizer in the character of Shiva has surrendered under her feet, under the feet of Kali, beyond time.” His disciple Larissa Fardelos, a graduate student in University of Toronto, has been working on an explication of a rare Sanskrit Vajrayana text by a tantric *mahasiddha* woman. She writes, “This narrative of Sahajayoginī Chintā’s life hinges on her search to understand the philosophical notion of *sva-para-hitam*, which Kulavadhuta Satpurananda translates as, “‘You do good to yourself it becomes good to others,’ or ‘you do good to others and it becomes good to yourself,’” and alternatively as the, “co-production of good.” In the text, Chintā moves out of her monastic enclosure, she awakens as a *dakini* and realizes *sva-para-hitam*. I understand this dictum as a call to compassionate action.

I conclude with an invocation of the wisdom being, the goddess Ganga, in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Although sometimes patriarchal Buddhists dictate that women have to be born in male form in order to attain Buddhahood, in this section the Buddha speaks to Ananda with prophetic words: “In a cosmic future, called the Great Star-like Aeon, she will attain full enlightenment. She will become a Tathagata named Golden Flower – a victorious one, insurpassable in transcendent insight and liberative art, one who has disappeared into pure presence and who knows the nature of all phenomena to be pure presence, a compassionate tamer of wild consciousness, a skillful educator of divine and human beings, a Buddha, a humble Lord of Enlightenment.”¹³

NOTES

¹ Rita Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 136.

² In my work, I have used the word Gynocentric (with a capital G) to denote the tantric worldview of India where the Divine Feminine reigns supreme. See “Gynocentric Theology of Tantric Hinduism: A Meditation upon the Devi,” *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali’s Footprints in Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Indialog, 2004).

³ Quoted in Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 209-10.

⁴ Keith Dowman, *Sky Dancer: The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Yeshe Tsogyal* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), p. xii.

⁵ Les Hixon, *Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra* (Kolkata: Alchemy, 2004), p. 17.

⁶ Chogyam Trungpa, *Glimpses of Space: The Feminine Principle and Evam* (Halifax: Vajradhatu Publications, 1999), pp. 11-12.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸ Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002), p. 13.

⁹ Taigen Dan Leighton, *Visions of Awakening Space and Time: Dogen and the Lotus Sutra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 96.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹ See Gross, *Feminism and Religion*, pp. 192-93

¹² Dowman, *Sky Dancer*, p. 86.

¹³ Hixon, *Mother of the Buddhas*, p. 155.

The Healing Power of Compassion in the Stories of the Buddha's First Daughters

Karen C. Lang

Verses composed by the Buddha's first disciples circulated orally for generations before they were finally collected and written down in the first century BCE. The *Therāgāthā* (*Verses of Enlightened Monks*) and *Therīgāthā* (*Verses of Enlightened Nuns*) were composed over a period of about 300 years from the end of sixth century BCE to end of the third century BCE.¹ These verses celebrate the accounts of personal struggle for enlightenment experienced by these men and women as they put into practice the teachings of the Buddha. The verses in the *Therāgāthā* and *Therīgāthā* convey the message that the Buddha's spiritual path is open to men and women alike.² Both monks and nuns took off the adornments of lay life, put on identical shapeless robes, and began the same process of personal transformation that culminated in the deathless, cool, and tranquil state of *nibbāna*.

Buddhism is unique among religious traditions in preserving texts composed by women in its canon. The *Therīgāthā* verses were composed by or about 70 eminent nuns (*therī*), who were among the first of the Buddha's followers to realize enlightenment. Sources used include the *Therīgāthā* and the commentarial literature, namely, the *Apadāna* (*Noble Deeds*) and the commentaries of Buddhaghosa (*Dhammapadā-atthakathā*, the *Commentary on the Words of Dhamma*) and Dhammapāla (*Therīgāthā-atthakathā*, the *Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*). The *Apadāna* collection of hagiographical verses, written during the second or first century BCE, expands on the few biographical details found in the nuns' verses. The narratives about *therīs* establish that in the past these particular women performed positive karmic actions that resulted in their present revered status as enlightened nuns.³ These narratives inspire women, for, as Alice Collett observes, "they can be seen as speaking directly to women about female experience and as seeking to show that in any situation in which a woman might find herself, progress can be made on the path to awakening."⁴ The later commentarial literature followed the example set by the *Apadāna* of incorporating the nuns' verses into their own narratives, now written in prose.⁵

These nuns' compelling words and the stories woven around them over many centuries continue to inspire and heal the pain and suffering of contemporary Buddhists, as the stories of Cambodian refugees, collected by Anne Hansen, attest.⁶ This paper will focus on the stories of these exceptional women who joined the Buddhist community, the circumstances that led them to make this decision, how their compassionate actions healed the pain of many within the community, and how their stories of compassionate healing continue to inspire Buddhists today.

Loving Kindness and Compassion in Action

Compassion draws us out into the world, not away from it. But the seeds of compassion and love implanted in each of us must be cultivated in order to be effective in the world. In the *Metta Sutta*, the Buddha instructed his followers to radiate loving kindness and compassion out to all beings in all directions:

Just as a mother would protect
With her own life her child, her only child,

In the same way, for all beings,
Cultivate a heart that knows no boundaries.⁷

A mother's love for a child exemplifies the love and compassion that Buddhas and their enlightened disciples extend to all beings. Loving kindness for all beings takes root in a heart that cherishes all beings with the same self-sacrificing love that a mother feels for her child and grows with persistent cultivation. The warm and compassionate heart that develops through the practice of cultivating love extends first to our circle of friends and family and finally reaches outwards.

Within the circle of the Buddha's family, his cousin Ānanda's compassion for Mahāpajāpatī was instrumental in opening up the *sangha* to women. The Buddha had refused three times to grant his aunt and foster-mother, Gotamī, permission to enter the *sangha*. Saddened but determined, she cut her hair, put on yellow robes, and followed him. Moved by her tears and her determination, Ānanda approached the Buddha with her request. After Buddha acknowledged that women are capable of enlightenment, Ānanda persuaded him that her request should be granted out of gratitude since she nurtured him as if he were her own child. She entered the *sangha* along with 500 of her companions.⁸ In the *Therīgāthā*, she expressed her gratitude to the Buddha for freeing her from suffering.⁹ As the *Gotamī-apadāna* relates, Gotamī's compassion enabled these 500 women to follow her example and achieve enlightenment.¹⁰

The responsibilities of family life made heavier demands on women than on men, but few of the nuns whose verses are collected in the *Therīgāthā* mention escape from the burdens of marriage and motherhood as their motivation for entering the *sangha*. The *Therīgāthā-atthakathā* relates that a monk's teaching the Dhamma inspired Vaddha's mother to join a nunnery and leave her son in the care of relatives. But her concern and compassion for her son survived this separation. Years later, after he became a monk, she encouraged him to renounce worldly desires, cultivate self-discipline, and pursue the meditative practices of calm and insight that put an end to pain. Vaddha returned to his monastery, put his mother's advice into practice, and he also became an enlightened *arhat*.¹¹ The *Therīgāthā* records his grateful response: "Truly, my mother, because of her compassion, spurred me on with an excellent goad, viz. [her] words associated with the ultimate goal."¹² His mother's example, encouragement, and compassion for her son's pain enabled him to eradicate the defilements, end suffering, and achieve enlightenment.¹³

Grief over the loss or death of cherished family members motivated many women to become nuns. The compassionate advice they received from the Buddha and his followers alleviated the pain of losing loved ones and brought them into the *sangha*. The monk Sopāka¹⁴ says that all beings should be treated in the same way as a mother would care for her only beloved son. Enlightened people love all beings with irreproachable impartiality. However, a mother's love is sometimes criticized as being tarnished by her attachment. This attachment inevitably leads to intense suffering when a beloved child dies. Several nuns whose verses are included in the *Therīgāthā* collection describe how their anguish over the death of their children drove them insane and how the Buddha's compassion healed their suffering.¹⁵ As their stories make clear, the Buddha's compassionate teachings healed these mothers' pain and put them on the path to liberation.

Kisāgotamī is best known of these grieving mothers' stories. In the *Therīgāthā* verses, she speaks of the pain produced by giving birth and then losing a child to death.¹⁶ The Buddha's recognition of her suffering and his teachings on the eightfold noble path removed the dart of her

pain and liberated her mind. The commentaries provide the details of her painful life and her recovery from madness. She was scorned by her husband's family until she gave birth to a son. When this beloved child died, she refused to believe that he could not be revived. She carried his corpse from house to house, unable to find any medicine to heal him, until an old man pointed her in the Buddha's direction. The Buddha promised her medicine if she could bring back a mustard seed from a home in which no one had ever died. After a futile search, she understood the universal nature of death, left her son's body on the cremation ground, entered the *sangha*, and soon achieved arhatship.¹⁷

Another therī, Vāsītthī, narrates a similar story of the afflictions of grief and madness, and the healing power of the Buddha's compassion:

Afflicted by grief for my son, my mind disturbed, deranged, naked,
my hair disheveled, I wandered here and there.
I lived in garbage dumps, cremation grounds and on the road.
For three years I wandered hungry and thirsty.
Then I saw the Buddha in the city of Mithilā, the tamer of untamed,
the fearless enlightened one.
My mind restored, I paid homage to him and sat down.
Out of compassion, Gotama taught me the Dhamma.¹⁸

She seems to be the same Vāsītthī who reappears later in the *Therīgāthā* verses of Sundarī.¹⁹ Vāsītthī told the brahmin Sujata and his daughter Sundarī, who were mourning the death of their son and brother, about how taking refuge in the Buddha, his teachings, and *sangha*, enabled her to overcome her grief over the death of her children. Her story inspired Sujata to seek refuge in the Buddha, whose teachings on the four noble truths released him from all pain.²⁰ Hubert Durt examined the story of Vāsītthī (Sanskrit: Vāsīṣṭhī) as told in various Sanskrit versions and in Chinese translations of original Indic texts, and found that these sources combine the two *Therīgāthā* passages into one family's narrative. After the Buddha's intervention, Vāsītthī recovered her sanity and encouraged her husband Sujata and her daughter Sundarī to enter the *sangha*.²¹ Vāsītthī's story, in all of its variants, emphasizes the compassionate gift of the Dharma – specifically, the Buddha's teachings about the four noble truths – which liberated her from all pain.

The Inspiration of Paṭācārā's Story

Paṭācārā's harrowing story of loss and recovery²² seems to have had the most lasting impact. The *Therīgāthā-atthakathā* and *Dhammapadā-atthakathā* commentaries describe in detail the deaths of her husband, two sons, her parents, and a brother. Paṭācārā set out for her parents' house, but labor pains and a violent rainstorm stopped her. While trying to build a shelter from the rain, her husband died from a poisonous snakebite. She gathered up her newborn son and her older child but, carrying both children in her arms, she could not cross the swollen river to her parents' house. She took youngest child across first. As she returned for the older child, a predatory hawk seized the newborn baby, and the boy, hearing his mother's screams, drowned in the river trying to reach her. Alone, she traveled on only to find that, in the fury of the previous night's thunderstorm, her parents' house had

collapsed on them and that their bodies were burning on a funeral pyre. Intense grief over these untimely deaths led to her insanity and aimless wandering, as she lamented:

Both my children are dead; my husband is dead on the road;
my mother, father and brother burn on a single funeral pyre.²³

In village after village, uncaring villagers drove her away, until the Buddha intervened to restore her sanity. He told her that the tears she had shed over the deaths of her loved ones in past lives would fill four oceans with water. Her grief lessened as he continued to teach. His advice – “Relatives are no refuge for anyone grief-stricken by death” – prompted her to seek refuge in the *sangha*.²⁴ Soon afterwards, she had this liberating insight:

I washed my feet and watched water trickle down.
I focused my mind as if I were training a thoroughbred horse.
I took an oil lamp and entered my cell. I prepared my bed and
sat down on it. Then I took a needle and pulled out the
wick. The complete liberation of my mind was like extinguishing that lamp.²⁵

The *Dhammapadā-atthakathā* explains that when Paṭācārā first poured the water over her feet, streams of water spilled on the ground. As she watched these streams of water flow across the floor, she realized that some streams travel just a short distance and others much further; some people die young, others die in middle age, and still others die in old age, as had her own children, her brother, and parents. Like Kisagotamī, she now understood the universal nature of death.

In the *Therīgāthā*, following the account of Paṭācārā’s liberation, we find several verses attributed to a group of 30 nuns that she inspired. They followed her advice to practice the Buddha’s teachings; they meditated throughout the night, acquired knowledge of their past lives, clairvoyance, and destroyed all ignorance. Arising from meditation, they prostrated in gratitude before her: “We have taken your advice We have the threefold knowledge and are without defilements.”²⁶ Candā similarly expressed her gratitude for Paṭācārā’s teachings. She had been a destitute widow, without family to take her in, begging for food and water for seven years until she met Paṭācārā: “Paṭācārā out of compassion enabled me to enter the religious life. She encouraged me and urged me on to the ultimate goal.”²⁷ Another nun, Uttamā, reported that she was taught the Dharma by a nun “worthy of my trust” and encouraged to meditate, which led first to the joy and happiness of meditative absorption and, on the eighth day, to “ripping apart the mass of darkness.”²⁸ The *Therīgāthā-atthakathā* identifies this nun as Paṭācārā.²⁹ This commentary says that she also relieved the suffering of five hundred grieving mothers and brought them into the *sangha*. According to one of these women, “Truly, she has extracted my dart, hard to see, embedded in my heart She has expelled my grief for my son.”³⁰ The teachings that Paṭācārā received from the compassionate Buddha healed her pain and she, similarly motivated by compassion, healed the pain of many other grieving women. Paṭācārā’s story continues to inspire people. Anne Hansen found that Paṭācārā’s story was important to many of with Khmer refugees she worked with in the 1980. She writes, Paṭācārā’s life contains suffering, grief, madness, homelessness and healing, experiences many refugees have shared.”³¹ Hansen suggests that Paṭācārā’s story heals some of their trauma:

Not only does she experience terrible loss, but she is the only survivor among all of her family members – a situation all too common among the refugees. Certain events were particularly emphasized by the Khmer storytellers: the loss of her children, her madness, the way in which other people treat her, and particularly her nakedness – events that mark human vulnerability all too familiar to Khmer refugees. In the midst of this misery and loss, the Buddha’s reaction to Paṭācārā, even her nakedness, is notably different from that of other people, and his compassion for her is transformative.³²

The Buddha’s teachings and Paṭācārā’s acceptance of them transformed her life and she, in turn, consoled and healed others. One of the refugees Hansen quotes reflected on her story: “In society, people laughed about her craziness. However, after she listened to the dharma, she became a good person and she got enlightenment In my opinion, if people emphasize loving-kindness and think less about the law of karma, there will be a reduction of suffering because people acting out of loving kindness will create social justice in their community.”³³

Patacara Community Services, a nonsectarian Buddhist community working for social justice among the poor in Seattle, also takes inspiration from her story:

As a young woman, Patacara lost everything. Her husband, children, and parents all died in a series of unexpected and tragic events. Crazy with grief, she wandered naked and destitute, without family or a home, until the townspeople took pity on her and guided her to where the Buddha was teaching. He looked at her kindly and said, “Sister, recover your presence of mind.” Her lucid mind returned and with the Buddha’s help, she began her journey back to wholeness. She eventually became enlightened and one of the most respected and beloved teachers of her generation, with a special gift for being able to help people overwhelmed by grief and despair, as she once had been. Patacara Community Services will operate programs designed to help us “recover our presence of mind” together.”³⁴

This community defines its social mission as one centered on extending compassionate care to people who are suffering. They partner with other Seattle-area Dharma organizations to build “a nonsectarian movement for compassionate action,” which includes feeding and sheltering young adults and families struggling with poverty and homelessness. Working together with a network of other nonprofit organizations and community groups, they aim to end hunger and create a food safety net where nobody is left out or forgotten. Their current plans include opening Patacara’s Café in the spring of 2015. This café will use local food sources and serve “healthy, made-from-scratch vegetarian food.” They envision this café as a place where guests can pay what they can and nobody will be turned away. Patacara Community Services also teaches and empowers people with the skills they need for self-reliance, including cooking, nutrition, gardening. These are skills and resources that enable families in crisis to be healed.

Conclusion

The stories of the Buddha’s first daughters that are told in the *Therīgāthā* begin with Gotamī, whose tears led to Ānanda’s compassion and his advocacy of women entering the *sangha*. Gotamī’s

encouragement and compassion enabled many other women to follow the Buddha's path. Many of these women's stories reflect a pattern of grief and pain that is healed only through the compassionate gift of the Buddhist teachings. These enlightened women understand the interrelatedness of the human condition. All their stories share a similar message: the warm and compassionate heart that develops through the practice of cultivating compassion must extend beyond our friends and immediate family to encompass all beings in pain.

NOTES

¹ K. R. Norman, *The Elders' Verses II: Therīgāthā* (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1971), p. xxi.

² Peter Skilling, "Nuns, Laywomen, Donors, Goddesses: Female Roles in Early Indian Buddhism," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*. 24:2(2001):241–74.

³ Alice Collett, "The Female Past in Early Indian Buddhism: The Shared Narrative of the Seven sisters in the *Therī-Apadāna*," *Religions of South Asia* 5:1/2(2011) 216–21; Jonathan Walters, "A Voice from the Silence: The Buddha's Mother's Story," *History of Religions* 33:4(1994) 358–79; Jonathan Walters, "Gotami's Story: Introduction and Translation," *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 113–38; and Jonathan Walters, "Apadāna: Therī-apidāna": Wives of the Saints: Marriage and Kamma in the Path to Arahantship," *Women in Early Indian Buddhism: Comparative Textual Studies*, ed. Alice Collett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴ Collett, "The Female Past," pp. 221–22.

⁵ Walters, "A Voice from the Silence," pp. 364–65.

⁶ Charles Hallisey and Anne Hansen, "Narrative, Sub-Ethics, and the Moral Life: Some Evidence from Theravāda Buddhism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24(1996) 319–23.

⁷ *Metta Sutta* 4–7. All translations of Pāli texts are my own.

⁸ Reiko Ohumna, *Ties That Bind: Maternal Imagery and Discourse in Indian Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 86–112. On p. 95, Ohuma considers the Buddha's response not as an explicit refusal but as "a sort of warning: 'Stop Gotamī! Don't set your mind on women going forth' ...!" See also Liz Williams, "A Whisper in the Silence: Nuns Before Mahāpajāpatī," *Buddhist Studies Review* 17:2(2000) 167–73. Gisela Krey, "Some Remarks on the Status of Nuns and Laywomen in Early Buddhism," *Dignity & Discipline: Reviving Full Ordination for Buddhist Nun*, ed. Thea Mohr and Jampa Tsedron (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), pp. 49–50, agrees with Williams that the Buddha was not reluctant to ordain women and follows Ute Hüsken in taking the Buddha's response, *mā te rucci* ("let it not please you") as advice "gently formulated" in response to Mahāpajāpatī's request, but she notes that Mahāpajāpatī did interpret his answer as a refusal. I would translate the Pāli text that Krey quotes in Appendix 1 (p. 56),

alam, gotami, mā te rucci mātugāmassa tathāgata-ppavedite dhammavinaye agāasmā anagāriyam pabbajjā ti, as “Stop, Gotamī. Don’t pursue the women’s going forth from home into the homeless life in the doctrine and monastic discipline proclaimed by the Tathāgata.” The Buddha is represented here as telling her to stop and not pursue her request that he ordain women. She does stop, but the Buddha’s failure to grant his permission (*na bhagavā anujānāti*) understandably depresses her. Ānanda receives the same response from the Buddha, but he adamantly refuses to stop pressing her appeal. He succeeds in getting the Buddha to permit women to go forth, if they will follow eight additional rules.

⁹ *Therīgāthā* 157.

¹⁰ Walters, “A Voice from the Silence,” p. 373.

¹¹ William Pruitt, ed., *Therīgāthā-atthakathā* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1998), 218–22; cf., Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, pp. 51–52.

¹² *Theragāthā* 210.

¹³ In *Theragāthā* 335–39, Vaddha describes how, with his mother’s assistance, he attains supreme enlightenment (*sambodhim uttamam*).

¹⁴ *Therīgāthā* 33.

¹⁵ Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*, pp. 36–65.

¹⁶ *Therīgāthā* 213–23.

¹⁷ Walters, “Apadāna,” p. 169; Ohnuma, *Ties That Bind*,” pp. 47–48.

¹⁸ *Therīgāthā* 133–36.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 312–18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 319–22.

²¹ Hubert Durt, “The Vicissitudes of Vāsītthī/Vāsīṣṭhī Who Became Insane Due to the Loss of Her Child: From Therīgāthā to Mahāyāna,” *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* 4(2001) 28–43.

²² Her story is told in *Therīgāthā* 112–16, 127–32, and retold in more detail in the commentaries. See Walters, “Apadāna,” p.168; Collett, “The Female Past,” pp. 222–24; William Pruitt, trans. *The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1999), pp.143–54; Eugene Watson Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends. Translated from the Original Pali Text of the Dhammapada Commentary*, part 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), pp. 250–56.

²³ H. C. Norman, *The Commentary on the Dhammapadā*, vol. 2 (London: Luzac & Company, Ltd., 1970), p. 266.

²⁴ See also Pruitt, *Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*, p.148; and Collett, “The Female Past,” pp. 222–24.

²⁵ *Therīgāthā* 114–16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 118–21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42–44.

²⁹ Pruitt, *The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*, p. 47.

³⁰ *Therīgāthā* 131; see Pruitt, *Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*, pp. 159–62.

³¹ Hallisey and Hansen, p. 322.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

³⁴ See <http://patacara.org>.

Loving Speech and Right Speech in Relation to Nonviolent Communications

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Pham Thi Minh Hoa)

For many years, I was closely in touch with people who were affected by domestic violence. Most of the victims were women and children. As a nun and Dharma teacher, I listened to many painful stories around the world that involved violence at different levels. As a result, I was moved to find some means to help people to become free from these problems. Violence, whether in thought, word, or action, leads to much stress and pain in the minds and lives of the people involved.

After listening compassionately, my job is to advise those affected about how to avoid situations that might trigger future violence. I found some very helpful sources of guidance in the ancient teachings of the Buddha. Loving speech (*metta-vācī kamma*) is one of the six principles for creating harmony in groups or society. Right speech (*sammā-vācī*) is one aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path that leads to freedom from all sufferings. The ways we communicate with others, whether by verbal and written statements or through bodily gestures, are all actions (*kamma/karma*) that have consequences and, as such, matter to all parties involved. Bad karma produces bitter and harmful results whereas good karma yields harmony, happiness, and satisfaction.

A popular form of communications training called Nonviolent Communications (NVC) offers advice that is very similar to the teachings of the Buddha. Marshall Rosenberg explains, “While studying the factors that affect our ability to stay compassionate, I was struck by the crucial role of language and our use of words. I have since identified a specific approach to communicating – both speaking and listening – that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. I call this Nonviolent Communication.”¹ We find a resonance between NVC and a passage from 2,500 years ago, when an elder monk named Vangisa captured his understanding on the way of “good speech” as taught by the Buddha as follows:

Speak only such words
As do not hurt yourself, Nor harm others.
Such speech is truly well spoken.
Speak only pleasing words,
Words received gladly;
Pleasing words are those
That don't have bad effects on others.
Truth itself is the undying word:
This is an eternal principle.
Realists say that the Dhamma and its meaning
Are grounded in the truth.²

As a factor that contributes to harmony and prosperous community, loving speech is speech that touches the heart of the listener. It makes one feel warm, well received, and respected. Such speech generates positive feelings and confidence. This does not mean false praise or flattery, which is vain and untrue. It means that we choose words that are pleasant and polite. When our conversation partner is in a good mood, well intentioned humor or jokes can also be a means of

skillful communication.

In giving and receiving verbal messages, there is an episode in the life of the Buddha that has always inspired me. When discussing the topic of right speech and non-violent communications, I tell this story again and again. This narrative describes how the Buddha emerged as a very well-known spiritual teacher in India, a land where many other religions and schools of philosophy also flourished. One day, a brahmin of uncertain motivation came to test the Buddha's patience and check whether he practiced what he preached. When he met the Buddha, the brahmin let forth a volley of abusive speech. He used many vulgar words and accused the Buddha of many unthinkably bad things the Buddha had never said or done. He went off on a monologue that lasted for almost two hours, until he was sweating and trembling as a result of his own violent speech and offensive gestures. Then, the brahmin paused to take a breath. The Buddha sat firmly and silently, but radiated a strong, compassionate presence. Taken aback, the brahmin asked,

“Wanderer Gotama, do you feel that you match all my accusations. Is that why you do not react to me?”

The Buddha calmly responded, “No, Brahmin, but the Tathagata does not feel any need to respond to the offensive behavior you displayed.” And he continued, “Brahmin, do you sometimes receive visits from your friends or relatives?”

“Yes, I am a respected person here and have many visitors,” the brahmin answered proudly.

“And do they bring gifts to you when they visit?”

“Yes, they do.”

“If you do not receive the gift, to whom it belong?”

“Of course, it belongs to the person who brought it in.”

“This morning you brought some gifts to me, but the Tathagata does not wish to receive these gifts. Now you have two options: either let it go or take it back with you.”

The brahmin’s jaw dropped. He became downcast and speechless, and did not know how to response.

This is a story about the Buddha, the fully enlightened One. But what about us, who have not reached the same level of patience and still live in a world ordinary beings? This question leads us to reflect on our practice as followers of the teachings of the enlightened ones. In practice, following these noble teachings and avoiding the habitual tendency and temptation to respond violently requires a lot of training and commitment. In this paper, I will present a step-by-step method for practicing non-violent communications in dealing with domestic violence, using Buddhist principles that pertain to relationships.

We know that the Buddha was born and grew up in this world of complex human relationships. After his enlightenment, he decided to teach to “those with little dusts in their eyes”, however, he did not expect that all who listened to his teachings would immediately reach enlightenment. His path to enlightenment is gradual. Right speech is the third factor of the Noble Eight-fold Path in the training of morality (*sīla-sikkhā*). In the early discourses, right speech is defined as follows: “And what is right speech? Abstaining from lying, from divisive speech, from abusive speech, & from idle chatter: This is called right speech.” (SN 45.8)

One of the dearly remembered discourses that embody this path is presented in *The Great Discourse on Happiness (Maha Mangala Sutta)*. Among 38 *dhammas* embracing a gradual path of practice to enlightenment, four concern speech and listening. Well-spoken words are called *subhaasitaa vaacaa* in Pāli. There are five factors that make a good spoken statement: the right time, truthfulness, affection, benefit to the listeners, and spoken with good intention. (AN 5, *Subhāsita Sutta*).

However, we should know that not all good intentions are received as good. We should be aware of others’ feelings and states of mind when they receive our messages. When is the right time? It depends on the context of one’s relationship. Besides, not all truths need to be revealed. Imagine that your partner has made past mistakes, and now you torture him or her through unkind words concerning the painful past. Is there any benefit to your relationship? It does not make you feel good either.

Now how can we communicate our uneasy feelings or to convey a truth that we consider beneficial but might be hard for others to receive? It takes skills and practice to make our statements less judgmental and non-offensive to listeners. Words are preceded by thoughts. So we need to take a few seconds to be mindful and watch the negative emotions fade. When we are calm, we are able to convey our needs or feelings.

There is no need for a prompt reply to unkind remarks or criticism. It is painful to hear judgment when it is unfair to our services or good intentions. Remember what the Buddha suggested for such a situation, be silent, and compassionately absorb the hurt and pains of wounding speech. This pain might trigger us to react in a way that hurting back. And if we cannot flush out these uneasy feelings, it burns our hearts. The receivers and carriers of these words and pain will eventually become the offenders. Thus, bad karma never ends. This makes *samsāra* long and vicious. Life becomes more unbearable. Remember that, like the Tathagatha, we have a choice here, either to become a victim or to channel these negative emotions as mirrors for our own enlightenment. We become one who is not a receiver of ills, like the Buddha.

When we have not reached that stage, we need Dharma therapy to heal our hearts. Practicing forgiveness and loving kindness meditation will help soften our hearts and pacify and transform bitterness into understanding and compassion. From understanding suffering, we take a step further toward ending suffering for all. It takes *sīla* or moral commitment to stop unwholesome speech and violent communication. There are many passages in the Buddhist scriptures to guide us in the right way of communication. One such way is the power of reflection.

For example, in one occasion, when the Buddha advised Rahula, his own son, he said:

Whenever you want to perform a verbal act, you should reflect on it: “This verbal act I want to perform – would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an

unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?” If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal act of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction... it would be a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then any verbal act of that sort is fit for you to do.

While you are performing a verbal act, you should reflect on it: “This verbal act I am doing – is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal act, with painful consequences, painful results?” If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both... you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not... you may continue with it. Having performed a verbal act, you should reflect on it... If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful verbal act with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to a knowledgeable companion in the holy life. Having confessed it... you should exercise restraint in the future. But if, on reflection, you know that it did not lead to affliction... it was a skillful verbal action with happy consequences, happy results, then you should stay mentally refreshed and joyful, training day and night in skillful mental qualities.³

Reflection is perhaps the most important factor in making decisions about what and how we should articulate what we want to communicate with others. If we are mindful of our speech and its impacts on others, we will not say things that trigger others to respond in a way that harmful to us or to others.

NOTES

¹ Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 2nd ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003), p. 3.

² This passage appears in the *Theragāthā: Tameva vāca. bhāseyya, yāyattāna. na tāpaye; Pare ca na vihi.seyya, sā ve vācā subhāsītā. Piyavācameva bhāseyya, yā vācā pa.inanditā; Ya. anādāya pāpāni, paresa. bhāsate piya. Sacca. ve amatā vācā, esa dhammo sanantano; Sacce atthe ca dhamme ca, āhu santo pati..hitā.* Caroline Rhys Davids, trans., *Psalms of the Early Buddhists* (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1994), p. 401.

³ Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, A Translation from Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), pp. 525–26.

Gendering *Nyungne*: The Tibetan Buddhist Fasting Ritual

Darcie Price-Wallace

Nyungne (*smyung gnas*) is a Tibetan Buddhist ritual that focuses on karmic purification and merit-generation through the actions and performance of renunciation, fasting, recitation, prostration, invocation of silence, devotion, and in some ethnographic accounts, self-creation. In the ritual, the practitioner invokes the path of renunciation (taking the eight monastic vows) and the path of purification (fasting and prostrating) while visualizing and honoring the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenrezig (Avalokiteśvara) in the eleven-faced, thousand-armed form.¹ Thus, it is centered on re-enacting Gelongma Palmo's fasting practice and her devotion to Chenrezig. Often, gender implications of *nyungne* are emphasized. As depicted in several ethnographies, women outnumber men in its practice. It is usually performed in and organized in nunneries, and is often called a "woman's practice."²

Does framing *nyungne* as "woman's practice," however, reinforce dichotomies of gender, social status, and religious status? Through the austerities of *nyungne*, the practitioner not only generates an understanding of the limits of physicality but also enters a liminal space in which such dichotomies are temporarily suspended. Ultimately, understanding the meaning of this practice and structuring it as a "woman's practice" for practitioners regardless of gender, social status, and religious status has several benefits. These include: (1) re-enacting the narrative of the a female lineage holder in which the female body is accepted (and enlightened), thus highlighting the fourteenth tantric vow that forbids the denigration of women;³ (2) reinforcing and professionalizing nuns; and (3) potentially strengthening relationships between male and female lay practitioners and the renunciant community. In order to address these issues, this paper will examine the background of the lineage holder Gelongma Palmo and emphasize the benefits of bringing out the feminine elements of this ritual practice for practitioners of both genders.

Background of Gelongma Palmo's Life

Whether or not Gelongma Palmo was an historical person can be questioned, because there is lack of scholarship on her life or her extensive textual corpus.⁴ The scholarship of Ivette M. Vargas-O'Bryan focuses explicitly on written hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo from the medieval and modern periods as means to highlight the historical value of this figure in Tibetan religious history.⁵ Citing George N. Roerich's translation of the *Blue Annals* (1476-1478), Vargas notes that this is the only textual source that dates Gelongma Palmo's potential historical existence.⁶ In this text, she is depicted as a *bhiksunī* who worships Chenrezig, who then imparts a fasting lineage:

The Degree of propitiating Ārya Avolokiteśvara by performing the rite of fasting was preached by the Nun Laksmī (dPal mo) personally blessed by Ārya Avolokiteśvara . She taught it to the pandīta Ye shes bzang po (Jñānabhadra), blessed by her. He to Bal po (the Nepalese) Peñaba, blessed by him. They were all saints (siddhas)....

Also there existed a Lineage of the dmar-khrid (detailed exposition) of the Cycle of the Great

Merciful One (Mahākarunika). The Nun Laksmī (dGe-slong ma dPal mo) imparted it to dPal gyi bzang po (Śrībhadra). The latter to Rin chen bzang po who imparted it to Atiśa....⁷

Kim Gutschow notes that in such classical sources as the *Blue Annals*, Gelongma Palmo's narrative is terse compared to the considerable space devoted to later male proponents of the rite she initiated.⁸ Yet she continues to endure via written hagiographies and oral transmissions as expressed in the commemorative praise elements of the *nyungne* ritual. Complicating matters of identity and dating is the fact that there may be been several women by the name of of Palmo/Laksmī. Vargas notes that these additional figures include a nun, a Kashmiri woman credited with writing the *Anuttarayoga Tantras*, a princess, and others.⁹

Gelongma Palmo became a *siddha* in her own lifetime. Common elements in the Tibetan hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo include her royal birth, her contracting of leprosy, her search through devotion to a deity, her visualization and communication with Chenrezig, her ascetic practices, her final realization, and her reentry into ordinary life for the benefit of others.¹⁰ Key to Gelongma Palmo's narrative is her contracting of leprosy. Gelongma Palmo's ultimate eradication of the leprosy she contracted serves as a metaphor for her liberation from *samsara*.

Leprosy plays a significant role in Gelongma Palmo's hagiography. Her contracting of leprosy serves as a skillful means to impart the non-dual ontology of tantra. Vargas notes, "In accordance with Buddhist ideas, Nun Palmo transformed leprosy, a condition most people view as a detriment and an impure state, into an opportunity to practice the Dharma or express her full commitment to the Buddhist teachings and to teach others (as she eventually did). Therefore, illness has a purpose."¹¹ Contracting leprosy enables Gelongma Palmo to absorb the physical limitations of her body and understand suffering not only for her own redemption but for others as well. Most importantly, when she is cured of her leprosy, she accepts both suffering and her body as a woman. Like Tārā, she insists on being reborn as a woman for the sake of others and achieves liberation in a female body.¹²

After becoming a nun, the hagiographies of Gelongma Palmo insinuate that she was entrenched in what Ronald Davidson delineates as institutional esoterism (established primarily on the lower tantras, for worldly powers and enlightenment).¹³ For instance, in some accounts, Gelongma Palmo distinguished herself in monastic debates and became the abbot of the monastery, yet after she contracts leprosy, when others perceive her as impure and are suspicious of her behavior, they accuse her of having of a miscarriage/abortion and then throw her out of the monastery.¹⁴ This example illustrates the mythic link between sexual misconduct and leprosy and insinuates that the illness was the consequence of unwholesome karma from the past.

In another instance, she is believed to have violated her vows by performing a *ghan gcig skyes pa* dance at the Zhag rgyad cemetery.¹⁵ Dancing in a cemetery could indicate that she was already engaged in transgressive practices outside of esoteric institutions. This behavior was considered unscrupulous and offensive by the uninformed. In fact, if she were in the social sphere of *siddha* esoterism wherein one rejects conventional morality, these practices would not be at issue.¹⁶ This seems to be the case because to prove the falsity of these accusations, she removes her own head and places it on the tip of a walking stick. The severed head speaks and says that it would be rejoined with her body if her vows were intact, and then does so.¹⁷ This is reminiscent of the link between the Yoginī Mahāsiddhā Laksmīnkarā who authored the text on Chinnamundā, who also severed her own

head, symbolizing spiritual accomplishment.¹⁸ While her hagiographies generate some of the more esoteric elements particular to *siddha* esoterism, these elements are not included in the *nyungne* ritual as currently delineated.

Gendering of *Nyungne*

Structuring *nyungne* as a “woman’s practice” has several benefits: (1) to reenact the narrative of a female lineage holder as a means to emphasize that the tantric vows forbid discrimination against women;¹⁹ (2) to validate the presence of *bhiksuni*s in the community and to professionalize their roles; and (3) to potentially strengthen relationships between male and female lay practitioners with and among male and female renunciates.

The biographies of Gelongma Palmo used in Vargas’ work were all composed by men (except for one and some of the praise texts).²⁰ Gelongma Palmo’s biographers clearly saw her as having a gendered identity – as a princess, a daughter, a sister. Thus, in their retelling of her narrative, her ritual practices come alive as gendered elements in two significant ways. First, her primary means of ritual purification is fasting, a practice closely linked to female religious identity in India. Second, her monastic vows as a *bhiksuni* identify her as a woman; they deny her sexuality, but not her gender.

Buddhist texts often present a confusing view of women. In tantric Buddhism, the practitioner takes a vow never to denigrate any woman, verbally or mentally.²¹ Citing Diana Paul, Hanna notes that references to women in the Mahāyāna texts vary from denying women the opportunity to practice the *bodhisattva* path, to saying that a woman can reach enlightenment if she changes her sex, and then to saying that she can attain enlightenment on the same terms as men.²² As a female lineage holder of *nyungne*, Gelongma Palmo fits into this last category. Her biography, as retold by historians, portrays her in female form and lauds her ability to become enlightened in a female form. Paradoxically, however, her gendered identity becomes temporarily suspended in the ritual itself.

Aside from the key ritual elements of invoking the 24-hour eight-precept vows (Mahāyāna *sojong*), fasting, and visualizing Chenrezig, this ritual utilizes the body (a female body) as a means for transformation.²³ Thus, Gelongpa Palmo’s narrative, commemorated and enacted via the ritual, serves to change the semiotics of the capabilities of the female body in Buddhism. Asceticism serves as her vehicle for regaining control over the suffering experienced in her physical form as a leper. Beyond her transformation on an individual level, she serves the ideological function of symbolizing a process of dissolving afflictions. Thus, understanding the meaning of this practice and structuring it as a “woman’s practice” for practitioners of both genders reinforces the fourteenth tantric vow. In some respects, this element of generating awareness of a positive view of the female form occurs through visualization. Through the practice of visualizing Chenrezig and the utilization of her leprous body in ascetic practices, Gelongpa Palmo creates a positive attitude within a female form and demonstrates that physical transformations are possible by means of the practice. Through her sense of self-agency and invoking the fast, she regained a purified state.²⁴

The liturgical text and biography of Gelongma Palmo express the visualization of Chenrezig through visualizing his form in front of oneself and also through self-generation, a practice in which

the practitioner imagines herself to be Chenrezig.²⁵ There are varied interpretations as to what level of visualization, self-generation, and self-creation is invoked through the deity in the *nyungne* practice. In some accounts, deity identification is not essential. The Zangskari fasters that Gutschow interviewed did not stress identification with the deity nor with Gelongma Palmo, but instead viewed *nyungne* solely as a rite of purifying afflictions as a means to attain a better rebirth.²⁶

There is also a question about the manner in which Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo are visualized, as the emic interpretation is different than the etic. In some ethnographic accounts, the practitioner is said to invoke an identification with Chenrezig (self-generation) and envision herself as Gelongma Palmo.²⁷ In Ortner, according to the lama who recounts the biography of Gelongma Palmo, the practitioner performs prostrations and recitations as if the “worshiper were the gelongma herself, talking to Pawo Chenrezig, saying ‘thank you,’ and reciting other phrases of gratitude and obligation.”²⁸ Similarly, Zivkovic notes, “In embodied re-enactment, prostrations become a physical expression of Gelongma Palmo’s path from suffering to liberation, which brings the nun’s ritual lineage from the past into the present.”²⁹ Thus, reenacting the narrative of the female lineage holder genders the practice. Doing so establishes a space for male and female practitioners to recall the first noble truth as well as to move beyond discriminatory gender practices.

The gendering of *nyungne* also serves to reinforce the value of nuns to their communities and to professionalize their roles. The issue of ordination status for these religious women presents another aporia regarding Buddhism’s relationship to women. Havnevik notes, “Despite the fact that the main Buddhist doctrines do not devalue women, and Tantric ideology highly praises them, Tibetan nuns continue to find themselves at the bottom of the religious hierarchy.”³⁰ As demonstrated in Makley’s ethnography, the nuns live in harsh conditions in an unstable economic state. Often fasting for patrons is their only means to sustain themselves. *Nyungne*, however, also serves to professionalize their role for laypeople seeking merit. Karma Lekshe Tsomo notes that while Gelongma Palmo was a fully ordained *bhiksuni*, it appears that she was not able to transmit the *bhiksuni* lineage to Tibet, because the *vinaya* requires that a complete *bhiksuni sangha* to be present in order to administer ordination.³¹ Thus, another ideological function of Gelongma Palmo is her uncontested status as an ordained *bhiksuni*.

The gendering of *nyungne* can potentially serve to strengthen relationships between male and female laypersons and between male and female monastics. Currently, this does not appear to be the experience of the women represented in ethnographies of Amdo, Zangskar, and India, even though, as documented in several ethnographic accounts, women are the primary practitioners of *nyungne*. While Vargas notes that we cannot confirm that *nyungne* was a gendered practice in the past, the increased participation of both nuns and laywomen in Buddhist communities today can easily be witnessed.

In some accounts, male lamas attribute women’s affiliation with the ritual to the female progenitor of the lineage. These lamas perceive the increase in female participation to be generated by a need for female role models and deities, just as males have.³² Similarly, as Havnevik notes, “K. March observed that during a *nyungne* ritual in the Solu monastery of Chiwon, women outnumbered men seven to one.”³³ The conclusion generated by reports from Havenik’s informants at various nunneries in India, including Tilokpur and Dharamsala, is that more women than men practice the ritual because it was started by a *bhiksuni*.

In both Gutschow and Makley's ethnographies, the biographical account of Gelongma Palmo is not at the forefront of the ritual. In Gutschow's examination of *nyungne* in Zangskar, she notes that women comprise a large percentage of fasting practitioners, because they represent a "lower rebirth."³⁴ Makley's ethnographic work echoes the sentiment that women "were seen to be less able than men to exert control over bodily compulsions and emotions, to concentrate and as one monk friend put it 'to think things through.'"³⁵ The phenomenological experiences of these women demonstrate their sense of otherness within the community. In contrast, Vargas' ethnographic work illustrates that Gelongma Palmo becomes a buddha-like figure for many practitioners.³⁶ In brief, practitioners of *nyungne* vary in their orientations toward Gelongma Palmo. They become identified with Gelongma Palmo, not only commemorating her, but also reinventing themselves through the ritual performance of invoking similar physical limitations, suffering, and pain as a means of karmic purification, merit generation, and ultimately Buddhahood. Moreover, Gelongma Palmo's narrative of suffering and healing serves to bring "awareness to impermanence, disruption of identity, and loss of human agency."³⁷

Conclusion

If Gelongma Palmo's narrative is at the forefront of the ritual, would the gendering of *nyungne* potentially serve to strengthen relationships among male and female lay practitioners as well as with and among male and female monastic communities? In Bell's analysis of ritual, "the purpose of cultural gender constructions and the rituals that reinforce them is to distinguish and polarize gender roles as the most fundamental form of cultural 'ordering' that human beings attempt to impose on nature."³⁸ Each practitioner is enacting the *sojong* vows and difference is momentarily suspended, such that there is no question of gender inequality or *bhiksuni* status. Gendering *nyungne* from the outside, suspending gender dichotomies in the ritual, and re-emerging from the ritual transformed can potentially strengthen gendered relationships via the compassion of Chenrezig and Gelongma Palmo. To gain a better understanding of this practice and how it may mitigate social gender asymmetry, a deeper exploration of how men and women approach the practice is necessary. More importantly, *nyungne* is a merit-making ritual. Collective merit-making rites are beneficial for all participants involved in multiple ways, enhancing overall well-being, creating the causes for a good rebirth in the future, and establishing social status in the present.³⁹

NOTES

¹ Lotsawa Tony Duff, "Rite for Taking the Eight Vows: Liturgy and Commentary to the Practice" (Kathmandu: Padma Karpo Translation Committee, 2008).

² Ivette Maria Vargas, "Falling to Pieces, Emerging Whole: Suffering Illness and Healing Renunciation in the Life of Gelongma Palmo." Ph.D Dissertation, Harvard University, 2003, pp. 27-28; and Ivette M. Vargas-O'Bryan, "The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo: The Experiences of a Leper, Founder of A Fasting Ritual and Transmitter of Buddhist Teachings on Suffering and Renunciation in Tibetan Religious History," *Journal of International Association of Buddhist Studies* 24:2(2001) 159.

³ Hanna Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns: History, Cultural Norms and Social Reality* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1989), p. 143.

⁴ Vargas-O'Bryan, "The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo," p. 163.

⁵ Vargas, "Falling to Pieces," and Vargas-O'Bryan, "The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo," pp. 160–61. The main Tibetan texts that she references are Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's (1341–1433) *The Sacred Biography of the Lineage Gurus of the State of Fasting*; 'Od dpag rdo rje's (14th–15th century, *The Sacred Biography of Gelongma Palmo*; and 'Brug pa Bla ma Rab brtan's modern text, *The Liberation Story of Gelongma Palmo: A Religious Discourse for Generating Renunciation in the Mind Stream*.

⁶ George N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banaridass, 1976).

⁷ From "The Chapter on the Lineage of the system of dPalmo (Laksmī) of the Cycle of Avalokiteśvara." Vargas-O'Bryan, "The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo," p. 162–63, citing Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, pp. 1007-8, 1044, 1018.

⁸ Kim Gutschow, "The *smyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar: How Liminality Depends on Structure," *Ladakh: Culture, History, and Development Between Himalaya and Karakoram* (Recent Research in Ladakh 8), ed. Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen and Poul Pendersen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1999): 155.

⁹ Vargas, "Falling to Pieces," p. 21

¹⁰ Vargas, "The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo," p. 165.

¹¹ Vargas, "Falling to Pieces," pp. 84, 90.

¹² *Ibid.*, 103-104.

¹³ Christian K. Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Seminology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 171-73.

¹⁴ Gutschow, "The *smyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar," p. 154.

¹⁵ Roberto Vitali, "The Transmission of Bsnyung Gnas in India, The Kathmandu Valley and Tibet (10th–12th Centuries)," *Tibetan Buddhist Literature and Praxis: Studies in its Formative Period, 900-1400*, Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, ed. Ronald M. Davidson and Christian K. Wedemeyer (Leiden: Oxford, 2003, 2006), pp. 231-32.

¹⁶ Wedemeyer, *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism*, 171.

¹⁷ Vitali, "The Transmission of Bsnyung Gnas," p. 231.

- ¹⁸ On the correlation between Chinnamastā, a Hindu goddess, and Chinnamuttā, see Kinsley, 144-166.
- ¹⁹ Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, p. 143.
- ²⁰ Vargas, “Falling to Pieces,” 146.
- ²¹ Eva. K. Neumaier-Dargyay, “Buddhist Thought from a Feminist Perspective,” *Gender, Genre, and Religion: Feminist Reflections*, ed. Morny Joy and Eva. K. Nuemair-Dargyay (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995), p. 161; Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, p. 143; and John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 319.
- ²² Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, p. 142.
- ²³ Vargas, “Falling to Pieces,” p. 136.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ²⁶ Gutschow, “The *smyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar,” p. 157.
- ²⁷ Sherry Ortner, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 51; and Tanya Zivkovic, “Embodying the Past: Gelongma Palmo and Tibetan Nyunge Rituals,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 27:2(2013) 58-59.
- ²⁸ Ortner, *Sherpas Through Their Rituals*, p. 51.
- ²⁹ Zivkovic, “Embodying the Past,” p. 54.
- ³⁰ Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, p. 143.
- ³¹ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Tibetan Nuns and Nunneries,” *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet*, ed. Janice D. Willis (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), pp. 120-21.
- ³² Vargas, “Falling to Pieces,” p. 146.
- ³³ Kathryn March, *The Intermediacy of Women: Female Gender Symbolism and the Social Position of Women among Tamangs and Sherpas of Highland Nepal*, Unpublished thesis, Cornell University, 1979), p. 284. Cited in Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, p. 113.
- ³⁴ Gutschow, “The *smyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar,” p. 157.
- ³⁵ Charlene E. Makley, “The Body of a Nun: Nunhood and Gender in Contemporary Amdo,” *Women in Tibet*, ed. Janet Gyatso and Hanna Havnevik (New York: Columbia University Press,

2005), p. 270.

³⁶ Vargas, “The Life of Dge slong ma Dpal mo,” pp. 112-13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

³⁸ Catherine Bell, “*Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 101.

³⁹ Nancy Eberhardt, *Imagining the Course of Life: Self-Transformation in a Shan Buddhist Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), p. 109.

Tracing a Path to Resilience through Compassion

Teresa I. Sivilli

I want to tell you a story. About a decade ago, a young journalist on assignment with the BBC in East Timor was profoundly shocked by the violence and appalling conditions there and changed careers, deciding that he could do more good as a humanitarian worker, directly supporting those affected by the political crisis, rather than by reporting on the situation. The shock didn't come from seeing a dead body. He had seen a dead person before, but his grandfather had looked peaceful, as if he were sleeping. The shock came from seeing dead people by the dozen and countless living people packed into deplorable refugee camps. Distancing himself from his surroundings with gallows humor, he finished the assignment and was next posted to Rwanda. He was not prepared for the visceral hatred of one group of people for others who had previously been their neighbors, co-workers, friends. Nothing could prepare him for the sight of children hacked to pieces in the streets.

His employer offered him a stress management course, where he learned the signs and symptoms of stress, and that it was important to get enough sleep, to eat regularly, and to do some relaxation exercises. He thought of that training with amusement as he slept on the open ground after the tornado hit Haiti, where he had recently arrived to work on earthquake reconstruction. He had watched the contents of his new office blow by him; he was saved because a partition pinned him down and protected him from flying debris and the torrential rains.

Finally, a couple of years later, debilitated by a decade of struggling with the suffering in this world, from the combined forces of humans and nature, he broke down. This young man, who has been unable to work for three years, attended the Garrison Institute's Contemplative-Based Resilience (CBR) training in May 2014. Finally, in the safe space of the training, he was able to let himself remember and to begin to talk about his experiences.

All of the elements of this story are true, although I have combined the histories of several people into one narrative to protect the identities of these individuals. It is not possible to prevent people from suffering when they encounter the suffering of others, or prevent them from being changed by the experience, and we would not want to do that. But it is possible to give people a context to understand suffering, both their own and that of others; to understand their reactions to suffering; and to give them tools to build and reinforce their resilience – to help them understand and grow from their experiences rather than being deflated by them. While empathy is the path to understanding our shared suffering, compassion is the path of transformation, the path to greater resilience.

For Buddhists, these are familiar concepts. But how do we integrate these ideas into the workplace, particularly in a workplace that encompasses every possible combination of religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds? How do we build resilience with compassion in a professional setting? The concept of resilience – the ability to bounce back from adversity – has gained great traction in the common discourse. But less well known are the methods for helping people to become more resilient. Resilience is a cluster of positive behaviors and habits of mind that can be cultivated and reinforced very effectively through contemplative practices such as meditation and yoga.¹

This hypothesis is being translated from theory into practice at the Garrison Institute, which has launched its CBR training program to build resilience skills in humanitarian aid workers. Aid workers, who respond to natural and man-made disasters around the world, are constantly exposed

to traumatic experiences, both their own and those of the affected populations with whom they are working. Faced daily with overwhelming suffering, and often powerless to alleviate it, aid workers often burn out, and experience what is commonly called “compassion fatigue.” In reality, as Sharon Salzburg (and advisor to the CBR program) has pointed out, compassion fatigue should more rightly be called “empathy fatigue.” Empathy – feeling and understanding the suffering of others – can become overwhelming. Balancing empathy with compassion, an active state of wishing to alleviate suffering, is the empowering solution to this dilemma.

My entry into this topic is through a discussion of stress, because when we understand the effects of stress, and its causes, we can understand more clearly why practices like meditation and yoga can be protective against stress. We generally think of stress as undesirable, but it is more useful to view its effects as occurring on a continuum, from boredom to exhaustion. If one is lifting weights to exercise, and is capable of lifting a 15 kg weight, a 5 kg weight is not challenging enough, and a 30 kg weight is overwhelming. Similarly, work that does not engage the mind is boring, but too much work, or work that is beyond the capacity of the person, is overwhelming. So when we talk about stress, it is more helpful to think of it in terms of a challenge, and to remember that there is a level of challenge that is engaging and exciting, and then another level that is overwhelming.²

When confronted by a challenge or stressor, our body prepares to defend itself. The stress response is common to all mammals, but the human stress response is unique in that it can be turned on or off, not just by external events, but also by the way we think about those events, and even by events that we imagine. In other words, our stress response is determined by: (1) how we perceive and interpret the stressor; (2) how we react to it; and (3) whether we feel a sense of agency, that is, whether we have some control over the situation, or at the very least, some control over our reaction to the situation. The way a person perceives a challenge and responds to it will determine whether that experience is positive or negative.

The body and mind interact in the stress response. Meditators know that our thoughts affect our body. We can calm ourselves at any time with meditation practices and we do not need someone to stick electrodes on our scalps to know that is happening. We do not often remember that the reverse is true: that we can create a stress reaction in our bodies with our thoughts, without any external event. U.S. author Mark Twain once remarked: “I have experienced a great many calamities in my life, some of which actually happened.” It is a funny comment, until we realize that the stress generated by imaginary calamities does just as much damage to our bodies as a real event. This damage is measurable through various physiological markers. Our bodies and minds are linked in the stress response. People who are psychologically reactive – people who are fearful or react easily to any provocation – tend to have more intense physiological responses to stress than those who are mentally steady. Those who are able to remain calm in the face of stress have less intense physiological responses to stress.³

A calmer psychological profile is also a more pro-social profile, associated with helping behaviors. One of the exciting findings to emerge from the nascent field of compassion research is that meditation – including mindfulness and loving kindness and compassion meditations – and yoga are associated with better physical and emotional health. Contemplative practices affect precisely the systems that can become dysregulated by acute and chronic stress.

When we designed the CBRT program for humanitarian aid workers, we focused on certain key facts and needs:

- The work environment of aid workers is rarely conducive to good physical, mental, or emotional health: long work hours, a limited diet, limited opportunities for exercise, and separation from family and friends for long periods of time are the norm. Aid workers are constantly confronted with overwhelming suffering. It is not possible to have sufficient material or emotional resources to “solve” the intractable problems of the populations they work with. While some misguided souls choose this career for inappropriate reasons, such as running away from their own personal problems at home, or because they are looking for adventure, most aid workers are dedicated individuals who sincerely seek to use their skills and training to improve the conditions of the populations they work with.
- Few NGOs offer sufficient or effective preparation for the stress that is inherent to aid work.
- Negative coping is endemic. Some of the most frequently used coping methods in field settings are excessive alcohol use, risky sexual behaviors, risky driving, and disregard of personal safety and the safety of others.
- Although the sector is evolving slowly, a “cowboy” mentality pervades humanitarian settings. The qualities that are admired in aid workers are a willingness to try anything, no matter how foolhardy; a willingness to take undue risks and boast about it afterwards; a refusal to admit to emotional needs; and a disdain for self-care.

One of the most poignant symptoms of this crisis that was described to us is becoming angry at the affected population for their problems, and a corresponding unwillingness to do what is possible to help. For example, “Why don’t those typhoon victims do more to help themselves? It’s their own fault if they have to sleep another night in the rain. I am not going to go out of my way to deliver the tarps down to their camp.” This is a crisis of compassion, born of true exhaustion, delivered by someone who is overwhelmed by exposure to suffering.

Another challenge facing aid workers is burnout, which is a separate phenomenon from chronic stress. An essential component of burnout is a loss of meaning, a disconnection from purpose. Questions about the meaning of one’s life are not often discussed in the workplace, belonging more to the provenance of religion. Yet this is where religion, or a definition of values for those who do not profess a religion, intersects with professional life and helps to determine whether an individual will be able to persevere through the demands of professions where burnout is common. Reawakening aid workers to their innate compassion is essential in restoring the meaning of their work. Moving from empathy to compassion is central to resolving burnout, because too often aid workers have become disconnected from their work in an attempt to protect themselves from the pain of others.

The CBR program brings aid workers together in groups of 10 to 50, depending on the setting. Some trainings are open to anyone in the sector; others are sponsored by a particular organization for its employees. Trainings are led by teams comprised of faculty in meditation, movement, and psychology, with an additional facilitator and team leader from the Garrison Institute. Although the training itself is not a clinical or therapeutic intervention and the purpose is not to hold group therapy sessions, traumatic memories often emerge, and for that reason participants have access to a mental health clinician.

Trainings begin by creating a safe container for reflection and sharing and are structured to demonstrate ways to integrate healthy habits into the workday. The morning begins with yoga, utilizing movements designed to awaken and energize the body. Presentations and meditation instruction are punctuated by breaks and healthy meals. Additional movement is integrated into the day; one long break allows for exercise, including a guided, mindful walk or a nap, and the day ends with restorative yoga. The psychosocial, meditation, and movement sections are integrated around core elements: focus and attention; sensation; thoughts and emotions; loving kindness and compassion. We ask people to reflect on their own behaviors when they are healthy, which will differ for each person, give them tools to help them become aware when they are moving away from a healthy zone, and methods to restore themselves to balance.

One point of true connection, in every training, is the moment when people look around the room with the sudden awareness that they are not alone, that their experiences and suffering are universal. This is the beginning of transformation, the beginning of a shift in perception away from “me” and towards “we.”

The yoga movements can be practiced anywhere, with little in the way of props or equipment. We emphasize grounding into the body: becoming aware of sensation and the importance of relaxation to regulate stress systems. And we specifically illustrate the use of movement to relieve overwhelming emotions.

Because this is a secular program, we do not refer to the Buddha or the Dharma in the meditation practices. Yet the practices will be familiar to students of Buddhism, as they are drawn from the Pāli tradition and were developed by Sharon Salzberg, one of the founders of the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts. We focus on mindfulness of breathing, of sensation, thought, and emotion, and loving kindness and compassion.

The psychosocial material was created to explain that the human stress response is designed to protect us from danger, and that stress reactions are not a sign of weakness but a normal response to threat. Our bodies do not distinguish between a physical threat, such as a tiger, and a psychological threat, such as my boss yelling at me for a mistake. We explain the components of resilience and offer evidence to demonstrate that contemplative practices are effective ways to build resilience skills.

The work is transformative. We have observed dysfunctional individuals become energized and inspired. People who had left field work decide they are able to return. Some of our participants come to us at the end of a long journey in search of healing. We launch them back out into the world with new tools, for the CBR training is, at its heart, a departure point.

Pain is a natural part of life. There is enormous suffering in this world, but there is also profound joy and great beauty. The joy and beauty of life unfold in the moments of deep connection that arise when we open our hearts to each other.

Paradoxically, the path to happiness lies not in avoiding or denying suffering, but in confronting it openly and honestly, in understanding it and transforming it. In doing that, we become fully alive. We are not impotent in the face of pain. Compassion is not weak. It gives us the strength, resilience, and courage to face whatever life throws at us. It is not easy to transform suffering, but it is possible.

As our compassion grows, we let go of our rigid, constrained views of ourselves and others and relate to everyone from a place of warmth, with a gentle, wise humor. Compassion is a way of

looking at the world that is profoundly healing and very optimistic. It is the path of love, the path of transformation. With the CBR training program, the Garrison Institute is bringing compassion into some of the most challenging workplaces in the world.

NOTES

¹ T. I. Sivilli and T. W. W. Pace, *The Human Dimensions of Resilience: Engaging and Empowering People, Organizations and Networks* (New York: Garrison Institute, 2014).

² H. Selye, “The Nature of Stress,” *Basal Facts* 7:1(1985) 3–11.

³ B. S. McEwen, “Stress, Adaptation, and Disease: Allostasis and Assostatic Load,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 840(1998) 33–44.

The Lives of Women in Ancient China Who Used Chinese Characters

Jeong Wan Sunim

Researchers who are interested in women's literacy mostly agree that there is a significant gap between women's experiences with reading and writing, and the patriarchal, ideological stance that aims to control women's literacy and educational activities. Unlike men, Chinese women have faced systemic limitations to accessing formal and professional education. As a result, women became literate through informal means. They learned to write in private from their mothers, nannies, or tutors. Although there is no record of public institutions that taught women Chinese characters, there are some records related to education for special groups of women. The *Biquini zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Nuns) is important because it allows us to view the types of letters women learned and used during the fifth and sixth centuries. The *Biquini zhuan* also tells us that *bhikkhuni* temples served as educational institutions for women, in addition to the informal education women may have had access to at home.

Temples as Educational Institutions

Buddhist education is highly significant in East Asia's cultural history and made great contributions to traditional societies. However, throughout the history of education in East Asia, Buddhist education has hardly been mentioned or received limited mention. Most research on Buddhist education consists of interpretations of the thought and practice reflected in the scriptures or the pedagogy of male priests.

This study focuses on Buddhist temples as places of traditional social education, rather than approaching it from the perspective of doctrine or ideology. By examining the type of education that Buddhist temples provided throughout history, I will show that Buddhist temples were not merely religious sanctuaries, but also educational spaces in which a variety of academic activities took place.

Education is the process of distributing and transforming knowledge, and the history of education tracks this process over time. This study examines the traditional educational functions of Buddhist temples from three vantage points: (1) as spaces for public edification; (2) as alternative schools; and (3) as educational centers for women.

The Temple as a Space for Public Edification

Edification is a social function of religion and the edification of all sentient beings is one of Mahāyāna Buddhism's most salient features. Edification is also an instructional act and signifies social education. Sentient beings are learners and the teacher of Dharma is an edifier as well as an educator. The temple is a place of enlightenment, a space where education takes place.

Throughout East Asian history, Buddhist temples have been formal locations in society. They provide a disciplinary space for monastics, a religious space for followers of the Buddhist faith, a locale for art and culture, and an area for edifying sentient beings in various ways. Temples are sites for edification, due to the theories propounded by eminent monks, but these theories do not explain all of the temples' educational functions.

Temples provide space for cultural and artistic activities, which also serve an edifying function. In Buddhist temples, Buddhist culture manifests in religious ceremonies and architecture, which express the concept of hierophany and impart a sense of sacredness. By using ceremonies and architecture as media, people receive the educational content of Buddhism and, as learners, their ability to think changes. This is the right kind of education.

Although Buddhist scriptures have traditionally communicated religious doctrine, historically, information was not normally conveyed in written form. Considering that most of the general public in early China was illiterate, only a few educated monks read scripture. The public most commonly came into direct contact with Buddhist temples, paintings of the Buddha, and sculptures. Buddhism's formative arts or material culture, such as painting, sculpture, crafts, and architecture, were the most active means of spreading religious ideas; simultaneously, this kind of art was the primary object of faith.

The formative arts are an extremely contradictory aspect of Buddhist culture, compared with Confucianism, another major cultural tradition of East Asian countries. Unlike Confucianism, which has a strong literary tradition, Buddhist culture uses powerful, non-literary features in addition to literature. According to Buddhist thinking, architecture imparts meaning through its very existence; individual examples of architecture and space have their own unique independent existence. Buddhist sites are open and public in nature; they provide a disciplinary space for monastics and also an area for public worship. Buddhist temples become the center of community cultural activities. They also function as inns and markets. To a broader extent, temples became multi-purpose areas.

The Temple as an Alternative School

In East Asian culture, the idea of a school was an invention of Confucianism. Since the time of the Imperial University during the reign of Emperor Wu of Han, schools have served as research centers for Confucianism and educational institutes to produce government officers, based on Confucian government theory. The concept of a school spread to several countries in East Asia, and Confucians formed a common culture based on their shared educational system. Certainly, Confucianism itself cannot describe the East Asian world. The notion of "school" or "school education" can explain Confucianism, but is not sufficient to explain education in East Asia.

It is widely known that Buddhism significantly influenced the formation of neo-Confucianism; using Confucianism alone to explain Confucian education and culture is therefore limiting. In terms of education at school, it is possible to easily describe national academic institutions within the framework of Confucianism. However, Buddhism and Confucianism were similar in providing education for literary learning.

Temples as Educational Spaces for Women

As imperial families and local elites began to support China's *bhikkhuni sangha*, temples for *bhikkhunis* became important institutions in society and centers of study and culture for Chinese women. According to Pao-chang, many *bhikkhunis* were learned teachers and respected leaders in early Chinese Buddhism. Some of them made a significant impact at imperial palaces and even on national policies because of their outstanding scholarly or religious accomplishments.¹ Others,

employed as national public officials, came to be in charge of *bhikkhuni* temples in capital cities.² These records of *bhikkhunis* are evidence that leaving the family life and entering a temple offered women an opportunity to pursue scholarly endeavors and gain fame in society.

Since its inception, *bhikkhuni* society had a close relationship with imperial women. During the period of the Southern Dynasty (420–589), halls for inner cultivation (*neidaochang*) were established for *bhikkhunis*. Famous *bhikkhunis* were sometimes invited by the imperial families to deliver lectures or give Buddhist teachings.³ In discussing temple life for *bhikkhunis* in traditional Chinese society, it needs to be emphasized that *bhikkhuni* temples were places for learning to write and study, and that close relationships existed between *bhikkhunis* and secular ruling elites. These two features have continued to play an important role in the history of the Chinese *bhikkhuni sangha*.

Official censuses did not usually separate the numbers of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. In those cases where they were separated, the reports indicate that the number of *bhikkhus* who had officially received the *upasampadā* (full ordination) was significantly higher than the number of *bhikkhunis*. Despite this, it can be verified that a large number of women, in addition to *bhikkhunis*, participated in Chinese Buddhism. The first census that separated the numbers of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* was conducted at the beginning of the eighth century. Among the total of 123,000 monastics, the number of *bhikkhunis* was 50,000, accounting for 40 percent of the total.

Certainly, some *bhikkhunis* during the period of the Southern and Northern Dynasties held high positions. While frequenting palaces, they took firm stances and also participated in disputes. It should be noted that this history is unique to China and can be interpreted as somewhat un-Buddhist, if anecdotes about Chinese Buddhism or Buddhist history are defined only as a series of relationships among *bhikkhus*. In fact, however, the male and female monastics have been ceaselessly interconnected with each other. Lily Xiao Hong Lee, a specialist on Chinese women's history and literature, points out that in the first chapter of the *Biquini zhuan*, *bhikkhunis* seem to have been allowed to interact with *bhikkhus* in various situations, such as borrowing Buddhist scriptures and participating in Buddhist ceremonies or philosophical discussions.⁴

Although *bhikkhunis* were neither respected nor supported by believers to the same extent that *bhikkhus* were, female monastics maintained the same religious privileges and power as *bhikkhus*. *Bhikkhus* were not able to exclude *bhikkhunis* from any ceremonies or religious performances. In theory, education for monastics was equally open to *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*.

The *Biquini zhuan*

Around the year 516, Pao-chang recorded the biographies of 65 outstanding *bhikkhunis*, most of whom were from social elites, and compiled them in the *Biquini zhuan*. All the outstanding *bhikkhunis* who were included lived between 319 and 357 CE. As documented in this record, the fact that Chinese *bhikkhunis* were initially social elites is significant.

Pao-ch'ang's *Biquini zhuan* is the first book about women in Chinese Buddhist temples. In the preface, Pao-ch'ang classifies the achievements and virtuous behavior demonstrated in the *bhikkhunis*' biographies into four types: (1) asceticism; (2) profound meditation and contemplation; (3) upright principles; and (4) great teaching.⁵ Erik Zürcher, a historian of Chinese Buddhism, describes the important roles for *bhikkhunis* that are suggested in the *Biquini zhuan* as follows:

Relatively speaking, *bhikkhunis* enjoy behavioral freedom and a wide range of social contact that most women believers do not have. They read and write. In fact, 80% of the *bhikkhunis* introduced in *Biquini zhuan* use literature. They learn the Buddhist scriptures by heart. These women point to a completely new phenomenon in the early Chinese Middle Ages. No Chinese women had ever enjoyed the same freedom or opportunity to develop and utilize their talents.⁶

The Buddhist scholar Bernard Faure argues, “Although Pao-chang’s *bhikkhunis* are idealized in the *Biquini zhuan*, they are described based on particular data on their social environment, education, and the process of leaving home to become a bonze in their realistic situations. Thus, despite its characteristics as a biography, the book becomes a precious reference.”⁷

It is believed that the *bhikkhunis* in the *Biquini zhuan* were outstanding not only in terms of erudition and refined literary talent, but also in their devotion, asceticism, meditation, learning, and teaching.

Conclusion

Similar to other societies, women in traditional Chinese society have been disadvantaged in terms of education. This has not only affected individual women, but has also had an impact on women’s relationships with religious thought and history. For a significant period of time, only a few women from certain classes were educated; a number of talented women had to make every endeavor to prove, to themselves and to others, that they also had the ability to think.

The characteristics of women’s lives and education in traditional Chinese society, as suggested in the information related to women found in historical documents and other literature, differ slightly depending on the time period. In general, however, their lives were limited to the home, isolated from decision-making processes in society, and educated only in preparation for their duties in the domestic sphere.

These characteristics of women’s lives in traditional Chinese society clearly suggest the form that women’s education took at the time. From ancient to modern times, women’s education was limited to the homemaking skills required for family life and the virtues needed to maintain the patriarchal family system. As such, women’s intellectual and affective development were sought only as a means to cultivate homemaking skills and womanly virtues in traditional societies throughout East Asian traditional societies in different eras. Women’s education allowed women to develop their abilities only insofar as they were related to homemaking, which was perceived to have socially inferior value, and not to develop their intellectual abilities related to the pursuit of theoretical knowledge. What is more, women were made to think of themselves as subjects with relatively inferior abilities. This caused them to consider their subordination to, and dependence on, men as a matter of fact, and thus did not offer them an opportunity to grow as autonomous subjects.

From this perspective, in the end, traditional women’s education in East Asia reproduced and reinforced women’s subordinate position. It was far from the kind of education that could enable women to develop their human consciousness as independent individuals who seek self-awareness, dignity, freedom, and happiness.

Bhikkhuni temples that women (that is, *bhikkhunis*) created, handed down, and developed

for themselves nevertheless served as places where women learned to write and were able to study in traditional Chinese society. The educational functions of *bhikkhuni* temples indicate that women had the power to provide themselves with systematic education. This demonstrates the power of women who can create and take charge of culture.

NOTES

¹ Tsukamoto Zenryu, 1968. *Chugoku Bukkyō Tsushi : Dai-ichi gan*. Tokyo: Suzuki Gakuzyutsu Zaidan, pp. 432-444.

² *Biquini zhuan*, T50.941a8-b2; *Ta sung seng shih lueh*, T54.243a13-16.

³ *Ta sung seng shih lueh* T54.247b17-18.

⁴ Lily Xiao Hong Lee, “The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and its Social Ramification,” *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia* 18/19(1986-87), pp. 82-100.

⁵ Unlike the *Kao seng chuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Monks), the *Biquini zhuan* (Biographies of Buddhist Nuns) does not list its content according to expertise or modes of achievement. However, the characteristics, moral virtue, and achievements that are common to many *bhikkhunis* can be discerned.

⁶ Jonathan A. Silk, ed., *Buddhism in China: Collected Papers of Erik Zürcher* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 395-417.

⁷ Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 26.

Chin Hui Pitt: An Exemplary Buddhist Woman Educator in Singapore

Zhen Yuan Shi

Chin Hui Pitt was born in China in 1902 and migrated to Malaya¹ at the age of five with her mother and sister Chin Xian. Chin Hui was a very close disciple of her Dharma master, Bhikkhu Ci Hang, who gave her two Dharma names: Zaihang and Zizai. In 1948, with her Dharma master's encouragement, she founded the Maha Bodhi School in Singapore. She devoted her entire lifetime to diligently spreading the Buddha's teachings in Singapore, contributing greatly to the field of Buddhist education to benefit children and create a more harmonious society. She ran the school herself, serving as the principal until her retirement in 1971 at the age of 70. She passed away in 1982 at the age of 81.

Chin Hui Pitt was a pioneer in Buddhist education in Singapore. As a devout lay follower, she believed that Buddhists had a duty to spread the Buddhadhamma. The three best ways to do so, she felt, were (1) to encourage children to study Buddhism, (2) to encourage adults to study and do research on Buddhism, and (3) to train Buddhist teachers to help develop and sustain the Buddhasasana (the Buddha's teachings). In addition, Chin Hui participated actively in the World Fellowship of Buddhists and contributed to the cooperation among the Buddhists of Singapore and Malaysia. In this paper, I will trace the important events of her life and her lasting legacy.

Introduction

Singapore is one of the most colorful ports in the world. It is situated on the southern tip of Asia, where the Indian Ocean meets the Pacific Ocean. It is a gateway and melting pot of East and West; here different races, religions, and customs thrive in harmony side by side and often intermingle. The name Singapore is not a Malay term. It comes from two Sanskrit words, "Singa Pura," meaning Lion City. It recalls a time before the arrival of Islam, when Indian influence was predominant.

In 1948, Chinese Buddhist education was introduced to Singapore and the Maha Bodhi School was founded, followed by the establishment of the Singapore Buddhist Federation in 1950. After many years of effort, more Buddhist elementary and intermediate schools developed. In this way, by the middle of the 20th century, Chinese Buddhist education had taken root in Singapore.

Chin Hui Pitt was born in 1902 into a wealthy, educated family in Faxian, Guangzhou. Her grandfather, Zan Guang Pitt, passed the imperial examination that was held annually in China during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, indicating that he was a scholar. He owned a hamlet called Zanguang with an orchard where lychee, longan, and other fruits trees grew. Zan Guang's two brothers were government officials and traditional Chinese practices were strictly adhered to by all members of the family. For example, Chin Hui said that every morning and evening her mother had to dress in a traditional skirt to serve tea respectfully to her mother-in-law. Chin Hui's mother gave birth to her after the sixth year of her marriage and Chin Hui's father passed away when she was only one year old. After experiencing the difficulties of married life, Chin Hui's mother decided to become a vegetarian while she was at a temple in Guangzhou. Out of concern for her children's future, she decided to search for new opportunities in Penang, Malaya, with the help of her relatives. When Chin Hui was five, her mother returned to China and decided to bring her to Penang. The main aim was

to provide Chin Hui with the opportunity to receive both Chinese and English education there.

In 1907, Chin Hui migrated to Penang, where she was educated in both Chinese and English. She became well known as Miss Pitt because of her fluent English. In 1924, she took the Senior Cambridge exams in English and was granted an official Cambridge certificate. Because she received an English education at a Roman Catholic school, she used to attend church every Sunday. In addition her studies at school, her mother employed a Chinese scholar to teach her classical Chinese poetry and culture in the evenings.

Chin Hui was well trained and became a teacher at Fukien Girls School (today's Penang Chinese Girls High School), the largest Chinese girls' school in Penang, when she was 24. In 1928, she went to further her studies in the Foreign Language Department of Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. She took up teaching again in Fukien Girls School in 1930 until the Japanese invaded in 1941.

When and how did Chin Hui become a Buddhist? Her mother, a devoted Buddhist, endeavored to establish the first vegetarian restaurant in Penang in 1932. Located on Swaton Street, it was called Maha Bodhi Restaurant. At that time her mother could only do the practice of paying homage and chanting the *sutras*. She could not understand the meaning of the Buddha's teachings, but she was very keen to practice generosity (*dana*) to every *sangha* member who visited her restaurant.

In 1938, Chin Hui was invited by her colleague Nong Shu Wang to study the teachings of the Buddha at Penang Phor Tay Institute. In 1939, the respected Chinese monk Bhikkhu Taixu and his followers organized a mission tour to Europe. As they passed through Penang, they visited Kek Lok Si Temple. The local *sangha* and lay Buddhist followers jointly organized a feast at Maha Bodhi Restaurant to entertain the guests. Later, a Dhamma talk by Bhikkhu Taixu was held at Kek Lok Si Temple. After listening to this talk, Chin Hui realized that Buddhism was not superstitious, but was a highly relevant scientific doctrine that appealed to people who wished to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of liberating the nation. This is how Chin Hui came to commit herself to Buddhism wholeheartedly. Under the strenuous moral guidance of Bhikkhu Ci Hang, her learned religious teacher, she devoted her entire energy to the study of Buddhism at Penang Buddhist Women's Institute (Phor Tay Institute, Penang) during the years of Japanese colonial rule. During the occupation, Chin Hui realized that the Japanese held Buddhism in high respect, which helped her to develop more confidence about becoming a Buddhist. At that time, all Chinese schools were forced to close, so Chin Hui took this opportunity to stay at Phor Tay Institute to study Buddhism.

In 1944, Chin Hui followed Bhikkhu Ci Hang to Singapore to further her studies in Buddhism at Leng Foong Buddhist Institute. Located on Kemaman Street, this was the first branch of Leng Foong Phor Tay Institute to be established in Singapore. Immediately after the Japanese surrender on September 3, 1945, Chin Hui was requested to return to Penang to teach Buddhism and English at Phor Tay Girls' School, a famous Buddhist school in Penang that she had helped found. She also became one of the English editors of a bilingual monthly magazine called *Buddhism for Humanity*.

The Establishment of Maha Bodhi School in Singapore

At the end of 1946, on the advice of Bhiksu Ci Hang, Chin Hui went to Singapore during her vacation to give a series of lectures on Buddhism at Leng Foong Phor Tay Institute. In those days (before 1964), Singapore was part of British Malaya. Singapore is a much larger place than Penang and, since a Buddhist school had already been established for the good of society in Penang, Chin Hui realized that there was a critical need to establish a Buddhist school in Singapore, too. After a year of unremitting effort, with the kind support of some Buddhist friends and wellwishers, a \$3,000 loan from Wu Zhen Yang, and the donation of 100 tables and chairs for the school from Lee Choon Seng, she succeeded in founding Maha Bodhi School.

In 1948, the school was established in a small shophouse, with more than 40 students. Chin Hui had a very hard time for almost four years, teaching day and night to support the school. She applied herself ardently and enthusiastically to the cause of Buddhist education. At the beginning, Nong Shu was invited to serve as the principal for one semester while Chin Hui was busy with management operations. Due to the construction of New Phor Tay School, however, Nong Shu was obligated to go back to Penang to move into the new premises. Therefore, Chin Hui had to carry on her mission in Singapore alone at Phor Tay's sister school. In addition to the usual lessons taught in other schools, Buddhism was added to the curriculum. Despite a shortage of human resources, limited classroom space, teaching materials, and financial aid, the number of students increased. Chin Hui compiled Buddhist textbooks in both Chinese and English under the title *A Bilingual Graduated Course on the Fundamental Teaching of Lord Buddha*. These textbooks are in great demand everywhere and have been reprinted several times.

In 1950, the school management committee decided to hand over the school to the Singapore Buddhist Federation of Singapore as part of a longterm development plan for propagating the Buddha's teachings for the benefit of school children. The president of the Singapore Buddhist Federation, Mr. Lee Choon Seng, immediately went into action to build a new school on new premises and the construction was completed in 1951. The magnificent building was officially opened by His Excellency Malcolm Macdonald, who was the Commissioner General for Southeast Asia. By 1956, the number of students enrolled reached 1,400. The members of the Singapore Buddhist Federation put forth their best efforts to purchase another big piece of land behind the school and construction on a five-storey building was completed in 1969. In 1995, the school moved to its present premises as part of a government development plan. At present, the number of students enrolled is more than 2,000 and it is one of the top ten schools in Singapore.

Buddhist Activities in Singapore and Beyond

There are three kinds of schools in Singapore: those run by the government, government-aided religious institutions, and private schools. In 1957, Maha Bodhi School decided to accept support from the government. It is now categorized as a government-aided school and continues to teach Buddhism as part of the ethics curriculum. The Government of Singapore, fully recognizing that the teaching of ethics and religion in schools is indispensable, has called upon representatives of all religions, including Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs, to develop courses in ethics and religion. Toward this end, a general committee and sub-committees were

formed under the chairmanship of Professor F. Mason. Chin Hui was one of the Buddhist representatives in the sub-committee who drew up new syllabi for the curriculum to be introduced in the schools.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB) conferences integrated Buddhists in Singapore and Malaya into the global Buddhist community. The Singapore Buddhist Federation was inaugurated in 1950 to serve as a headquarters for all Chinese Buddhist temples and organizations. In 1950, the Federation sent a delegation to attend the first conference of the WFB, held in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Chin Hui was officially elected to attend this conference. After the conference, she gave a lecture titled “The Strength of a Country is in the Virtues of its Citizens” at Anula College. She visited India and Burma on her way back to Singapore. In both countries, she was invited to give talks on Buddhism. When she returned to Singapore, she published a book about her pilgrimage to Ceylon, India, and Burma. At the request of the WFB headquarters in Ceylon, a Singapore Regional Center was incorporated in 1952. Chin Hui was the president of this center from its inception. She was the official head of the delegation that attended the second conference of WFB, held in Japan in 1952. At that conference, she was elected vice-president of WFB. She also led a delegation to Burma to attend the third Conference of WFB in Rangoon in 1954. At that conference, she was again elected vice-president of WFB. In 1956, she was invited by the Government of Nepal to lead a delegation to attend the fourth conference of the WFB held in that country. She also received an invitation from the Government of India, received through the Chief Secretary of the City of Singapore, to attend the Buddha Jayanti Celebrations in New Delhi in 1956. This illustrates how Buddhists of Malaya reached out internationally and confidently, using English as the means of communication. At WFB’s fourth meeting, the committee accepted a proposal to celebrate Vesak Day annually. The timing was just right for the Buddhists of Malaya to appeal to the government to recognize Vesak Day as a public holiday.

Chin Hui’s mother established Phor Tay Yuan, the first vegetarian restaurant in Penang, in the 1930s. It was a policy of the restaurant to offer meals (*dana*) to all monks and nuns. The idea had a positive effect in encouraging the practice of loving kindness among Buddhists. Now the idea of vegetarianism and kindness to animals expanded to Singapore, too. The project was carried out by the Malayan Vegetarian Society in Singapore, which should be highly commended for its continuous success in promoting vegetarian and animal welfare work. The Canine Welfare Association was formed under the sponsorship of the Singapore Buddhist Federation for practicing loving-kindness toward all living beings and working for their liberation.

Apart from being the principal of Maha Bodhi School (Phor Tay School, Singapore) and the president of the Singapore Regional Centre of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, Chin Hui also held many other positions. She was a member of the Singapore Girls’ Education Committee, a standing committee member of the Chinese Schools Conference, and a member of the Committee for Religion and Ethics in schools. She served as an executive committee member of the Singapore Buddhist Federation, a committee member of the Free School of the Singapore Chinese Buddhist Association, a member of the Singapore Council for Adult Education, and a member of the Singapore Voluntary Workers Association.

A Lasting Contribution

A determination to propagate the Buddhadhamma brought Chin Hui to Singapore and prompted her to found the first Maha Bodhi Buddhist School in 1948. When the school's management committee was formed in 1949, Mr. Lin Shi Wan was elected to be the chairperson. In 1950, the school's committee decided to establish the Singapore Buddhist Federation and elected Mr. Li Choong Seng to be the chairperson. The school received a Class One subsidy from the government in 1951 and became a government-aided school in 1957. Maha Bodhi was the first government-aided school to conduct English classes in 1970, becoming an integrated bilingual primary school. Finally, Manjusri Secondary School was established in 1982. Chin Hui exerted great effort to fulfill her vow, walking the path to enlightenment by promoting Buddhist education both nationally and internationally.

Chin Hui did her best to learn and to wholeheartedly experience the Buddha's teachings. She found these teachings to be essential to human life and believed that it was the duty of all Buddhists to forge ahead with firm resolve to find ways to successfully propagate the Buddhadhamma. To familiarize humanity with the teachings of the Buddha, she felt that Buddhists have three important duties: to encourage children to study Buddhism, to influence adults to study and research Buddhism, and to train Buddhist missionaries to develop and maintain Buddhism. These were Chin Hui's lasting contributions to nurturing the environment for the Buddha's *sāsana* in Singapore and Malaysia.

NOTE

¹ From the 18th century until 1946, Malaya was a confederation of states controlled by the British. Today, Malaysia and Singapore are independent states.

The Significance of Bhiksuni Hiu Wan's Prajña Chan, Compassion, and Art for Modern-day Education

Sheng Ying Shi

Bhiksuni Shig Hiu Wan (1912–2004), the founder of Huafan University, was an accomplished Chan practitioner who excelled in many fields due to her background in art, literature, and education. She was a student of the master painter Gao Jian Fu of the Ling Nan School of Fine Arts. She not only taught Chinese painting, but also researched Chinese painting theory and was a renowned traveler. During her early life, she traveled to more than thirty countries and held solo art exhibitions all over the world. Wherever she went, she did not hesitate to promote the excellence of Chinese culture and art, particularly once she had incorporated Buddhism, the arts, and education as major forces in her life. In Buddhist terms, it could be said that she was a living *bodhisattva* who exemplified many of the qualities of the *bodhisattva* ideal. Her achievements in the arts were recognised by the Taiwanese government in 1997 when she won the National Council for Culture Award. She told many people that her establishment of Huafan University was greatly inspired by her visit to Tagore University in India, where she was amazed to find an educational institution in a beautiful natural environment. Aspects of this four-year period of her life is portrayed in some of her artwork.

This essay explores three of the themes that occur frequently in her artwork – *dhyāna (chan)*, *prajña*, and *karuna* – and the implications of these themes for the education of modern-day youth, using Huafan University as an example. When Huafan University was established, it was designed as a bridge between Buddhist culture and Chinese culture. The “enlightened education” advocated by Bhiksuni Hiu Wan was the university’s guiding principle. She also proposed the “integration of the humanities and technology with an equal emphasis on the mutual enrichment of compassion and wisdom” as educational guidelines. These guidelines involve self-awakening, self-development, and rational thinking, based on Chinese ethics and Buddhist compassion. These themes clearly took center stage in her artwork. The university’s objectives are to cultivate the students’ academic competencies and to foster a deeper understanding of virtuous behavior, self-reflection, and all the inner qualities that are valued so much in young people.

Integrating Art and Education

Bhiksuni Hiu Wan’s life began beautifully with art and finished as an artistic masterpiece. She always aimed to integrate and achieve harmony among Buddhism, art, education, the events in her time, and the high ideals that she maintained in her life. During her early days in Taiwan, these ideals gradually culminated in a new phase of her artwork, with teaching, her establishment of Huafan University, and her lifelong dedication to education. She was particularly committed to raising the status of women and marginalized, underprivileged youth, and to uplifting the status of Buddhist practice at a time when Buddhist practitioners were not well respected by the general public in Taiwan. The expression of her inner qualities can be glimpsed in some of her art.

Bhiksuni Hiu Wan’s paintings can be classified either chronologically or thematically. A prevalent theme in her work is “awakening” – to avoid becoming overwhelmed by the passions, which leads to misery – and ultimately to achieve total liberation. Her commitment to education and her conviction that youth are capable of generating this kind of awakening can be observed in the

natural environment of Huafan University. A number of people have noted that the campus of Huafan University is one of her masterpieces. This is not only due to the landscape, but also to the fact that the university tries to instill a sense of self-worth and self-confidence in its students, fostering their creativity and expanding their intellectual horizons through nature, the arts and literature. All the students are encouraged to have a vision and steadily establish their “identity.” The goal is for their studies to become as enjoyable as a piece of artwork – to integrate art in life and make life itself art. In this way, university life is a life-changing experience for students.

Bhiksuni Hiu Wan’s ideals can be subsumed into three areas: *chan* (meditation, concentration, stilling the mind), *prajña* (the development of wisdom, a deep understanding of values and life), and *karuna* (compassion, integrating Buddhist values and traditional Chinese cultural values in education). These ideals are visible in her artwork. The discussion here is limited to an interpretation of these thematic values as expressed in her art and does not touch on her artistic skills.

Concentration (*Dhyāna*)

As a Chan practitioner, Bhiksuni Hiu Wan encouraged everyone to develop the ability to still the mind. There are frequent examples of concentration and wisdom in Buddhist texts. Concentration is likened to the flame of a butter lamp. The mind is similar to the flame. If the mind is not still, the flame will flicker. When the mind is turbulent, it is like a strong wind blowing the flame and making it extremely difficult to see clearly. When the mind is cluttered, the image that appears is shadowed. Wisdom is likened to the brightness of the flame. The stronger one’s concentration, the clearer the picture.

Bhiksuni Hiu Wan conveys the value of meditation and the development of a quiet, concentrated mind in many of her works. To foster concentration, there are at least three meditation halls, big and small, on the Huafan University campus grounds. A set of ten works titled “Taming the Bull” and a sculpture of the renowned Chan master Bai Zhang remind students of the importance of mental development. The qualities that Bhiksuni Hiu Wan wants to express are often represented by particular figures, such as Bodhidharma. Her painting titled “Exploration of Still Mind” shows a meditator standing before a high mountain and a bird flying in the sky. When asked the meaning of this painting, she responded, “Which is the most still of the three: the meditator, the bird, or the mind?” The work titled “Storing the Six Senses Pond in Front of the Prajña Hall” features a turtle in a pond before the hall, implying that learners on the path should always try to develop and restrain their senses, looking within, and using the six senses to reflect inwardly, not to criticize others. “Unmoving like a Mountain” illustrates a solid mountain, implying that the natural stillness of the mind will establish our concentration. “The Unmoving Mountain Displays Wisdom like an Ocean” extends this idea further, expressing that once the mind is still, wisdom as profound and vast as the ocean will arise naturally. “Sitting Alone Listening to the Birds” conveys the idea of participating in the natural environment without disturbing or intruding on it.

Wisdom (*Prajña*)

In a second group of paintings, Bhiksuni Hiu Wan expresses the theme of wisdom. This, of course, is just one among many ways to interpret her work. Paintings in this group include “The Buddhas of Old Speak Words as Clear and Bright as the Moon,” “Torch of Wisdom,” “Ajanta Caves: Ten Buddhas’ Shadow,” “Realization,” “Everything Ends in a Pile of Mud.” “Speaking of No Sounds in the Wind and Rain,” “Subtle,” “Epiphany: Everything is Contemplated as Suchness,” “Himalayas,” and “Search for Understanding.” These paintings explore the Buddhist teaching that wisdom is essential for achieving liberation from all miseries, including continual rebirth in the wheel of cyclic existence (*samsāra*). Bhiksuni Hiu Wan vibrantly uses a variety of media to succinctly express the message she wants to put across: enlightening education is none other than cultivating the mind. She frequently taught that in reaching enlightenment, “all is one totality.”

Compassion (*Karuna*)

The third theme that Bhiksuni Hiu Wan explores in her work is compassion. She demonstrates the compassion of a *bodhisattva* in her role as an educator and in everyday life by comforting and consoling all those in need. Among her paintings that express compassion are: “I and the Plum Blossom Withstand the Bitter Winter Cold,” “Motivation,” “Lotus” (a set of three paintings), “A Master Painting,” “A Master Standing before the Pines,” “A Master Writing Calligraphy,” “Morning Sun,” “A Practitioner Observing the Return of the Cloud,” “Standing Tall as a Pine,” and “Walk Where There are People.”

Bhiksuni Hiu Wan taught that compassion is expressed through the arts, but also in every aspect of daily life. She said that sometimes a practitioner gets sick because sentient beings are sick. She also said that a compassionate practitioner will walk among the crowd, because the value of the *bodhisattva* is in working with people in the community. If compassion is not in everyday life, then where is it? The *bodhisattva*’s aim is to liberate oneself, to liberate others, and to liberate all sentient beings, which is perfectly accomplished at the stage of Buddhahood. Standing on the shoulders of giants will enable us to look far and wide, keep high ideals, and walk much farther on the path.

Enlightening Education in Nature

The natural environment is a major component in all Bhiksuni Hiu Wan’s work. She teaches her students to be mindful and aware of their thoughts, to be one with nature, and to find their own true nature in the natural environment. If we are one with nature, we will do no harm to the environment and can create a sustainable, harmonious world. She often declared that education is the foundation for our collective future, so we need to pay closer attention to every action of daily life and show respect to others in order to maintain an equilibrium. She challenged her students to practice self-discipline, awareness, and attentiveness, and to internalize these values so they will automatically come to the fore when the need arises. Integrating these skills into our relationship to nature demonstrates the value of contemplation and “enlightening education.”

Looking at Bhiksuni Hiu Wan’s artwork through the lens of the three themes of concentration, wisdom, and compassion, I have tried to portray her vision for the education of youth.

I have attempted to look at the role that art played in her life and some of the values and viewpoints that she wanted to express through her work, particularly in educational settings such as Huafan University. She recognized that many young people today have been deprived of their artistic creativity. She very much hoped to enlighten youth, both in what is “expressed” and what is “unexpressed,” conveying values both literally and representationally.

Buddhist Schools in Australia: Buddhist Women's Roles

Thich Nu Phuoc Uyen

According to census figures, Australia had a population of 21,507,719 in 2011, of whom 61 percent were Christian. Buddhism was the largest non-Christian religion, with 2.5% of the total population, or 529,000 people.¹ However, there are only three Buddhist schools in Australia. With a recent significant growth in the Buddhist population in Australia, there is an urgent need for more Buddhist schools to accommodate the growing number of Buddhist students. Buddhist education is essential for teaching practical Buddhist methods for developing wisdom, loving kindness, and compassion. This paper will explore how Buddhist women can contribute more to Buddhist education and help Buddhism to grow in Australia.

Buddhist Immigrants in Australia

Many Chinese Buddhists arrived in Australia during the Gold Rush of the 1850s. The next wave of Buddhist immigrants were Sri Lankans who came to work in the sugar cane industry in northern Queensland. Japanese and Sinhalese Buddhist immigrants also arrived on Thursday Island in Northern Australian to work in the pearl industry.

Victoria had the greatest Buddhist population at 27,000 in 1857. In 1891 Buddhists represented 1.2 per cent of the Australian population. By 1911, however the total number had fallen to just 3,269 or 0.07 per cent.²

Many people returned to their homelands due to the decreased demand and opportunities in the industries where they worked. The White Australia Policy also had a significant impact.

In 1973, the end of the White Australia Policy opened the gates for the Buddhist community in Australia, especially Asian immigrants, to bond. The number of Buddhists in Australia has grown rapidly through the influx of immigrants from predominantly Buddhist countries such as Vietnam, Sri Lanka, China, Cambodia, Thailand, and so on.

The two visits of the Dalai Lama to Australia in 1982 and 1992 were joyful occasions for Buddhists of all traditions. Huge crowds of Buddhists and the general public gathered to hear him speak. It was evident that Buddhism had become a significant minority religion in Australia.³

In 1991, nearly one-third of Australia's Buddhists were born in Vietnam. According to Census 2011, with a population of 104,065, the Vietnamese Buddhist population continues to grow and continues to head the list of the top ten countries of birth among Buddhists born overseas.

Buddhist Temples and Leaders

Enid Adam described Buddhism in Australia as largely dependent upon

laypeople until the 1970s.⁴ By the 1970s, however, people felt the need for resident monks, and a new phase in Australian Buddhist life began. This was a time of male leadership, with Theravadin monasteries being established in New South Wales and Western Australia.

With successive waves of Asian immigrants, the settlement of Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Thai, and Lao Buddhists into communities created significant growth in the number of Buddhist temples throughout Australia. These temples continue to grow today and are preserving the Buddhists' cultural heritage in their second homeland.

Education Institutions

As the Australian sociologist Enid Adam has pointed out, the activities provided by Buddhist temple are usually suitable for adults.⁵ Writing in 1996, she notes that, "There are no full-time Buddhist Educational Institutions in Australia. Children normally attend their local government school for full-time secular education." However, Nan Tien Temple in Wollongong took a step forward in 2011, by establishing Nan Tien Institute (NTI), which the Institute's homepage describes as "Australia's first tertiary institution grounded in Applied Buddhist wisdom. NTI is the place for quality education and cultural exchange."

Pal High School, located in Canley Vale, Sydney, New South Wales, claims to be the first Buddhist high school in Australia. The school opened in 2013 to serve the needs of the community in the area. Daylesford Dharma School in Victoria is also well-known as 'the first primary school in Australia to offer an education based on Buddhist principles.' This independent village school, founded in 2009, is located an hour and half from Melbourne. The school has two classrooms, one for Grades 1 to 3 and the other for Grades 4 to 6. Students observe Buddhist principles, including wisdom, compassion, interdependence, and respect for all life.

Keysborough: A Case Study

A case study based on my fieldwork conducted in the community of Keysborough in Victoria provides information about the range of experiences, services, sites, and opportunities available to learners in culturally diverse and disadvantaged communities. According to the 2011 census, the community of Keysborough, located in the city of Greater Dandenong, was found to be the most disadvantaged community in Victoria.⁶ The city of Greater Dandenong is also the most ethnically diverse area in Victoria and the second most culturally diverse locality in Australia.

The 2011 census found that, among learning groups in Keysborough, the Buddhist community learning group accounts for 20.8 percent of learners in Greater Dandenong. This can be explained by the fact that Buddhism is the main religion in Vietnam, China, and Cambodia, and a high proportion of the population of

Keysborough belongs to these ethnic groups. There is one Buddhist temple in Keysborough that serves the spiritual needs of local Buddhists. It is at this temple that Buddhist children come into contact with their heritage religion, religious leaders, and other Buddhist families. The children carry their Buddhist values and beliefs to school.

My findings show that, except for Haileybury Keysborough School, all other local schools have a significantly high percentage of students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) students each year. The percentage may reach 70 percent at some schools and may be as high as 100 percent at Mt. Hira College and Sirius College. These students carry the seeds of their heritage religious cultures that need to be care for.

Children spend most of their time at school. Examine the profiles of local schoolsshow that there are only one government primary school and one government high school, but three Catholic schools and 2 Islamic schools. In an interview in *The Age* in 2002, Nicholas Dwyer, the vice principal of Haileybury College, said that the Catholic school “stands witness for Christianity in the style of the Uniting Church.”⁷ Resurrection Primary School makes its aim clear in its 2014 mission statement: “As parents, when you select Catholic Education, you are choosing to raise your children with Catholic values and practices.” Lighthouse Christian College is an independent co-educational Christian school that offers a complete education experience, from their Early Learning Centre for four-year-olds to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). According to its 2014 mission statement, Lighthouse Christian College aims “to support Christian families in the education and training of their children – reinforcing Biblical values, discipline and standards of conduct, so that they will fulfil God’s purposes in their lives.”

The Muslim community has two Islamic schools in the area. The vision of Mt. Hira College, as stated in 2014, is to “strive for excellence, in both academic and spiritual development.” All Muslim students at the school are required to attend noon prayers. Primary school students learn how to pray and secondary school students attend prayers at the local mosque with community members. The other Islamic school, Sirius College, states that it is “dedicated to nurturing the new generation of tomorrow.” The school’s motto “Reach for the Stars,” is “used to emphasize our ultimate goal, which is educating, mentoring, and motivating our students for reaching their future dreams.”

In 2011, McBrien found that Vietnamese parents were also concerned about future generations, valued education, and had high expectations for their children. They expressed the hope that the children would maintain their Buddhist values in addition to what might be considered more mainstream values. But which school should Buddhist parents send their children to?

Buddhist Women’s Leadership Roles

There is a relative lack of information about Buddhism in the online British Religion in the Numbers database and in academic journals and research on religion

that emphasizes quantitative methods.⁸ Wallace observes that Buddhism is under-represented in quantitative research, relative to Christianity and Islam.⁹ The simple reason may be that Buddhist scholars are simply “unfamiliar with this methodology of research or it may involve some resistance on behalf of Buddhists themselves.”¹⁰

Despite a paucity of quantitative studies on the topic, it is clear that gender inequalities still persist in contemporary religious traditions, including Buddhist societies and institutions globally.¹¹ Even though women have played a prominent role in Australia’s Buddhism, at least since the 1880s, they have received relatively little scholarly or public attention.¹²

Hallafoff¹³ and Adam¹⁴ agree that the increased numbers of resident monks and the building of monasteries introduced a “new time of male leadership” in Buddhism in Australia, although women continued to play a significant part in establishing and managing these Buddhist centers. Halafoff also emphasizes the leadership roles of Buddhist women as attested through their reputation in these communities:

Women have played a prominent role in Buddhism in Australia since the turn of the 20th century. Female Buddhists, or women with a strong interest in Buddhism, have brought and propagated Buddhist ideas into Australia, established and held leadership roles in Buddhist organizations, and become prominent Buddhist teachers and scholars who have taught both in and beyond the country’s borders. These women include Emma Harding Britten, Elise Pickett, Marie Byles, Natasha Jackson, Elizabeth Bell, Chikwang Sunim, Robina Courtin, and Judith Snodgrass.¹⁵

Buddhist women have been working very hard to support the building of facilities and the flourishing of Buddhism in Australia. Somehow, however, women have not yet fulfilled what may be their greatest strength, their motherly caring nature, in the education of Buddhist children.

As a religious leader, I am often invited to mainstream schools to share information about Buddhist beliefs and community activities. In those two-minute talks, I generally express my hope that the community will establish a Buddhist school in town. It seems that it will take time for my words to bear fruit and create an environment to nurture the younger generation of Buddhists sitting in front of me.

My question is: “How can Buddhism continue to develop in Australia without an education system?” Children learn and develop through their relationships with family and community. Religion is part of the macro system, together with social culture and values.¹⁶ Sadly, there are many Buddhist children who have not been served, and are still not being served, as children are nurtured in other religious traditions.

According to a survey conducted at Hoa Nghiem Vietnamese Language School, of the 182 students enrolled in 2013, 141 students (77 percent) were attending Catholic schools, even though the students identified as coming from a Buddhist background. In interviews, their parents commented that the reason they sent their children to Catholic schools was simply because there were no Buddhist schools in the surrounding area. N, a parent and psychologist, N serves as a lay Buddhist teacher at primary schools as

well as at Buddhist temples. She says that she encourages her children to learn about religions and their benefits, and will respect her children's choices when they grow up, whether they choose to be Buddhist or not. At the moment, her three children are following the Catholic tradition. L, a local ophthalmologist, and his wife M, a general practitioner, are Buddhist followers from families who have been Buddhists for many generations. When they migrated from Vietnam to Australia, they decided to send their three children to Catholic schools, so that they could get a good education and have a good future. T, a factory worker in the shoe industry, chooses to send her two children to the local Catholic school and hopes that her children can learn about Buddhism at the community language school.

The prevalence of Buddhists who send their children to Catholic schools seeking a better education is a warning signal, because there is a strong possibility that these Buddhist children will be converted to other religions. It is a bit sad to see that the next generation of Buddhist youth is receiving love and care from followers of other religions, while we Buddhist religious leaders are all busy fundraising, building more temples, and serving an aging population. Of course, we serve an important purpose in keeping alive the Buddhist cultural heritage among the refugee generation in Australia. But it is time that we ask whether it is more important to continue build temple or whether it is more important to turn our attention to creating Buddhist schools. The creation of Buddhist schools for future generations is a dream that I hope and believe all of us will want to move forward.

Conclusion

Nowadays, Buddhism is well known in the world as a religion of peace; therefore, it is well respected in Australia, a multicultural country. Over the last 40 years, Buddhism has developed very well in the immigrant community and has also exerted a strong influence on Western people, who most likely are not counted in statistics about Buddhism, because it is assumed that they already have their own religion. With an aging population, immigrants usually focus on providing care, social support, and assistance for the disadvantaged members of their communities: the aged, women, refugees, and so on. It like bringing a tree from another country and trying to grow it in Australia; the delicate tree needs to be cared for every moment of its young life, including its adaptation to a new environment, until the tree grows stronger. As the tree grows, however, it creates a new generation. There is an urgent need to nurture this *new* generation in *new* ways.

If there were more formal Buddhist schools that existed to cater to children, then the philosophy of Buddhism would continue into the next generation. Buddhist women should consider joining together to create mainstream schools for future generations of our children.

NOTES

- ¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Cultural Diversity in Australia. Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census, 2012–2013.” <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2071.0Main%20Features902012%E2%80%932013>, accessed May 12, 2015.
- ² P. Hughes, M. Fraser, and S. Reid, “Australia’s Religious Communities: Facts and Figures” (Nunawading, Victoria: Christian Research Association, 2012), pp. 30–33.
- ³ Enid Adam and Philip J. Hughes, *The Buddhists in Australia* (Canberra: Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, 1996), p. 11.
- ⁴ Enid Adam, “Buddhist Women in Australia,” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 1(2000)139.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “2011 Census QuickStats Keysborough.” http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC20705, accessed retrieved 10 May 2014.
- ⁷ Peter Wilmoth, “God and the Old School Ties,” *The Age*, November 17, 2002. <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/11/16/1037080962582.html>, accessed May 14, 2015.
- ⁸ P. N. Thanissaro, “What Makes You Not a Buddhist? A Preliminary Mapping of Values,” *Contemporary Buddhism* 13:2(2012) 321–47.
- ⁹ B. Alan Wallace, *Contemplative Science: Where Buddhism and Neuroscience Converge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 78.
- ¹⁰ Thanissaro, “What Makes You Not a Buddhist?” p. 321.
- ¹¹ Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Global Exchange: Women in the Transmission and Transformation of Buddhism,” *TransBuddhism: Transmission, Translation, Transformation*, ed. Nalini Bhushan, Jay L. Garfield, and Abraham Zablocki (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), p. 151.
- ¹² Anna Halafoff, “Venerable Robina Courtin: An Unconventional Buddhist?” *Buddhism in Australia: Traditions in Change*, ed. Cristina Rocha and Michelle Barker (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 148–52.
- ¹³ Anna Halafoff, “[In]visibility of Women in Buddhism in Australia,” *Seachanges* 6(2013) 15.
- ¹⁴ Adam, “Buddhist Women in Australia,” pp. 138–43.
- ¹⁵ Halafoff, “[In]visibility of Women,” p. 1.

¹⁶ J. L. McBrien, “The Importance of Context: Vietnamese, Somali, and Iranian Refugee Mothers Discuss Their Resettled Lives and Involvement in Their Children’s Schools,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 41:1(2011) 75–90.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Robina Courtin (Thubten Kunsel) has worked within the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) since 1978. She has been the editorial director of Wisdom Publications, editor of *Mandala* magazine, and executive director of Liberation Prison Project. She now teaches full-time at FPMT centers worldwide.

Diana Cousens received a Ph.D. in Himalayan Studies from Monash University in Australia with a thesis on the temple of Triloknath and the idea of self-arising objects in Tibetan Buddhism. She also publishes on the Tibetan treasure tradition and engaged Buddhism and is active in interfaith dialogue. For ten years, she represented H.H. Sakya Trizin in Melbourne and was the director of the Melbourne Sakya Center. She started studying Tibetan Buddhism in the early 1980s and has been a student of Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche since 1991. For many years, she was a committee member of the Buddhist Council of Victoria and has represented the Buddhist community to the government. She works at RMIT University and is an honorary fellow of Australian Catholic University, Melbourne. This is her fourth Sakyadhita conference presentation.

Bhikkhuni Dhammananda (Chatsumarn Kabilsingh) received an M.A. in Religion from McMaster University in Canada and a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Magadha University in India. She is currently the abbess of Songdhamma Kalyani Monastery in Nakhonpathom 73000 Thailand. For 30 years, she taught Buddhist Studies and Asian Philosophy at Thammasat University in Bangkok. She received *samanera* ordination in Sri Lanka in 2001 and the *upasampada* in 2003. She has authored and translated more than 100 books in both English and Thai on topics such as Buddhism history, Buddhism and environmental, and women and Buddhism. She has won numerous awards and is strongly committed to establishing an order of ordained women in Thailand. Her monastery has become an important international center for Buddhist learning and monastic training for women.

B. D. Dipananda was born in Chittagong, Bangladesh. He serves as a News and Media Editor at Buddhistdoor International and specializes in Buddhist commentary and news in South Asia. He has published prolifically in both Bengali and English about Buddhist studies, women's issues, and cultural studies. He earned his B.A. (Hons.) from Calcutta University, M.A. from Pune University in India, and M.B.S. (Master of Buddhist Studies) from the University of Hong Kong. Currently, he is pursuing an M.Phil. in the Center for Buddhist Studies at the University of Hong Kong.

Wilis Rengganiasih Endah Ekowati is a faculty member at the Syailendra Buddhist College in Semarang, Indonesia. She received her B.A. in dance from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Surakarta, and an M.A. in Religious Studies from the Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and from Florida International University. She is now a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at U.C. Berkeley. She offers free dance classes as part of her outreach program for Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities. For the past two years, she has collaborated with Warung Info Jagad Cleguk in Borobudur to provide art workshops and serves as an artistic consultant for a number of traditional performing art groups in the Magelang Region. Her experience and research attest that art is powerful in building understanding, honesty, and trust among individuals from different faith, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Arahmaiani Feisal is a leading figure in the contemporary art scene in Indonesia, working in

performance, painting, drawing, installation, video, poetry, dance and music. She was a featured artist in the Indonesia National Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale. Her work grapples with contemporary politics, violence, capitalism, the female body, and her own identity as a Muslim who mediates between Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, and animist beliefs. She often uses her public presence to draw attention to violence against women in general and to discrimination against women in Indonesia's Islamic society, in particular. Since September 11, she has combined a critical attitude toward Islam with protest against its stigmatization. Since 2010, she has been working with Tibetan monks in the Tibet Plateau on environmental issues.

Rita M. Gross is a scholar-practitioner who has studied and taught comparative studies in religion her entire life and has practiced Buddhism in several Tibetan lineages for 40 years. Her Ph. D. from the University of Chicago was the first dissertation to focus on women studies and feminist methodology in the field of religious studies. She taught at the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire for many years and is now professor emerita. She has written many books and articles dealing with gender and religion, often with a special focus on gender and Buddhism. Her best known book is *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism*. Her major book on gender and religion is *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction*. She was president of the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies and has been co-editor of its journal for ten years. Her most recent book is *Religious Diversity: What's the Problem? Buddhist Advice for Flourishing with Religious Diversity*. She teaches Buddhist meditation and Dharma to several Buddhist communities and is a senior teacher in the Mindrolling lineage of Tibetan Buddhism as taught by Jetuun Khandro Rinpoche.

Chenxing Han is currently completing a year-long chaplaincy residency at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Oakland, California. She recently completed an M.A. in Buddhist Studies and Buddhist Chaplaincy at the Graduate Theological Union and Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley, California. She graduated with honors from Stanford University with a B.A. in Science, Technology, and Society and a minor in Cultural and Social Anthropology.

Lenny Hidayat is a member of the advisory council for Kadam Choeling Indonesia. She has learned Bodhipatha Krama and attended annual retreats, meditations, and classes since 2003. She is also one of the principal researchers for Indonesia Governance Index. She earned a B.A. at the University of Indonesia and an M.A. in Public Policy from the University of Melbourne. Since then, she has dedicated her time to building and disseminating evidence-based policy research, such as IGI, which is widely known at the national and regional levels, and has become a reference for policy makers, activists, and the media. Lenny's background in development work started in 2005, when she joined a nationwide human rights campaign. Currently, she is advocating a more sound and fair policy in Indonesia through her organization, Partnership for Governance Reform.

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Hudaya Kandahjaya was born in Bogor, Indonesia, and is currently employed at BDK America in Berkeley, California. He received a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, in 2004. In addition to scholarly and literary studies, particularly on Indonesian Buddhism, he has also been engaged in the educational aspect of Buddhism, furthering his interest in the theoretical and practical aspects of Engaged Buddhism.

Seokjoo Kang is a Ph.D student in the Interdisciplinary Program in Gender Studies at Seoul National University, South Korea. She holds B.A. degrees in Religious Studies and M.A. in Gender Studies from Seoul National University. Her academic interests include developing languages for feminist theory and feminism's social accountability. She is also interested in historical religious philosophies as important sources of inspiration for her study and work.

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Karen Lang is a professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Virginia. She received her Ph.D. in Asian Languages and Literatures from the University of Washington. Her research and teaching interests focus on Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. She has taught courses on Buddhism, including Buddhism and Gender, and reading courses in Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan.

Amy Paris Langenberg is a specialist in Indian Buddhism with secondary training in classical Hinduism and Himalayan Buddhism. She earned her Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Columbia University and is now an assistant professor of Religious Studies at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Florida. She teaches courses on Asian religions (including their reception in the modern West), gender and religion, and theory and methods in religion. Her research focuses on Buddhist monastic legal traditions; Indian Buddhist understandings of sexuality, gender and body; Buddhist medicine, Buddhist aesthetics, and contemporary Buddhist nuns' movements in Asia. She is in the final stages of a book project titled *Birth in Buddhism: Fertility, the Fetus, and the Female in Indian Buddhist Texts from the Middle Period*.

Heru Suherman Lim is a host for Buddhastubhasita, a Buddhist radio program at Radio Cakrawala 98,3 FM Jakarta and a managing director at Mutiara Bangsa School. He is currently completing his Ph.D. in Education Administration at Indonesian University of Education, Bandung. He is often invited to speak at temples, Buddhist events, Dharma talks, educational seminars, and trainings. He is the author of *The Spirit of Dharma, Enjoy dalam Dharma* (Enjoy the Dharma), and *Gethek Kecil* (A Little Raft), and has edited numerous other books.

Latifah received her undergraduate degree from the Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and an M.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. In addition, she studied for a year at the Center for Cultural and Religious Studies (CRCS) at Gadjah Mada University. Since 2001, she has worked as an editor and a contributing journalist. Since 2012, she has been teaching at Kertarajasa Buddhist College, Malang, East Java. She is also a researcher at the Center for Culture and Frontiers Studies (CCFS) of Brawijaya University. Her research interests include gender, culture, and religion.

Annie McGhee is a certified yoga instructor through The Australasian Institute of Yoga (RYT500). She has been practicing and teaching several styles of yoga for over three decades. Her classes emphasize mindfulness and developing an open-hearted approach to life. Her other qualifications are Dip. Education and Dip. Interior Design, RMIT, Melbourne, Australia. She has worked both as a lay midwife and as a volunteer in palliative care for many years. She began her formal studies in Tibetan Buddhism in 1997 and has been researching the history of Buddhism in

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Thích Nu Nhu Nguyet (Nguyen Thi Thu Ha) graduated with a Ph.D. from the Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi, with research on the origin and development of the Bhikkhuni Sangha in Vietnam. Currently, she is a member of Board of Foreign Affairs of the Vietnamese Bhikkhuni Sangha and was vice-secretary general of the Vietnamese Conference Planning Committee for the 11th Sakyadhita International Conference. She is currently a lecturer in the Department of World History at Van Hanh University, Ho Chi Minh City. She also teaches at various monasteries in Vietnam and abroad.

Tenzin Palmo spent 18 years practicing in the remote Himalayan region of Lahaul. In 1973, she traveled to Hong Kong to receive the bhiksuni ordination. She is the founder of Dongyu Gatsal Ling, a monastery for the training of *togdenmas* (female yogic practitioners) near the community of Tashi Jong in northern India. Her story has been documented in *A Cave in the Snow*. She is the author of *Reflections On A Mountain Lake: Teachings on Practical Buddhism*.

Dian Pratiwi (Ang) was born in Medan, Indonesia, in 1964. In 1988, she completed a degree in the Faculty of English Literature and Letters at Methodist University of Indonesia (UMI), Medan. In 2011, she completed a Master's degree in Communications at Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta (UMJ). Currently, she is an education consultant and leadership and communications trainer in Pekanbaru and other areas in Riau Province. She served as the chair of the Indonesian Buddhist Women Fellowship (WBI) at Riau Province from 2005 to 2015.

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Neela Bhattacharya Saxena is professor of English and Women's Studies at Nassau Community College in New York. Her book *In the Beginning IS Desire: Tracing Kali's Footprints in Indian Literature* was published in 2004. Some of her other publications include "Mystery, Wonder and Knowledge in the Triadic Figure of Mahavidya Chinnamasta: A Shakta Woman's Reading" in *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism*; "Shekhinah on the 'Plane of Immanence': An Intimation of the Indic Great Mother in the Hebraic Wholly Other" in the

Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies; “Gaia Mandala: An Eco-Theological Vision of the Indic Shakti Tradition” in *InterCulture*; and “The Fun House Mirror of Tantric Studies: A Rejoinder to David White’s *Kiss of the Yogini* in *Evam*. She writes a blog called “Stand Under the Mother Principle” and is currently working on several book projects.

Sheng Ying Shi is currently a Ph.D. student in the Graduate School of Asian Humanities at Huaan University, Taiwan. Tiantai Buddhist perspectives inform her academic foundation. Her current research interests include the integration of Buddhist practices with education, in particular, how contemplation and meditation can be incorporated in students’ academic and daily life, and how social and spiritual contexts can be influential components in students’ lives.

Shiou-Ding Shi (Hsiu-Fei Wang) has been a *bhikkhuni* for 18 years (*vassa*). She is currently a doctoral student in the Graduate Institute of Religious Studies at National Cheng-Chi University in Taiwan.

Zhen Yuan Shi received an M.A. Buddhist Studies from the International Buddhist College (IBC) in Thailand and is currently completing a Ph.D. on Chapter 6 of Zhiyi’s *Mo He Zhi Guan*. She has worked as the secretary of Fan Yin Tang Buddhist Temple in Kuala Lumpur (1983-1992), the supervisor of Than Hsiang Temple Buddhist Sunday School in Penang (1999-2004), the director of Administrative Affairs at IBC since 2008, and a lecturer at IBC since 2009. She is also an advisor at Kawaii Kindergarten School in Songkhla, Thailand.

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Medya Silvita was born in a Buddhist family and began actively studying Buddhism in high school, serving as a volunteer at various monasteries in Jakarta during the weekends. As a student at Indonusa Esa Unggul University, she became actively involved in political, social, and religious activities, especially as a critic of the military assault on civil society during the Indonesian riots of 1998. She contributed to a training manual for human resource development for Buddhist organizations at the national level. She became the second woman to be elected leader of the Sekber PMVBI Indonesian Buddhayana Youth Fellowship, after 17 years of male leadership. Currently, she is still active in communications and public relations in Buddhist women’s organizations and informally supports Indonesian nuns.

Teresa I. (Teri) Sivilli, MPH, is the program manager for the Contemplative-Based Resiliency (CBR) Project at the Garrison Institute in New York, with an interest in the links between

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Bhikkhu Sujato (Anthony Best) is an Australian Buddhist monk. In 1994, he left his music career to take higher ordination in Thailand in the forest lineage of Ajahn Chah. After living for several years in forest monasteries and remote hermitages in Thailand, he spent three years in Bodhinyana Monastery (Perth) as the secretary of Ajahn Brahmavamso and over a year in a cave in Malaysia. He has combined his love of meditation with studying and teaching Buddhist texts from comparative and historical perspectives. His published books include a compilation of *sutta* passages on the theme of tranquillity and insight titled *A Swift Pair of Messengers* and many others. He served as founding Abbot of Santi Forest Monastery from 2003–2012. He currently resides at Bodhinyana Monastery, and teaches in Australia and internationally.

Hyo Seok Sunim earned her B.A. in Buddhist Studies from Dongguk University in Korea, an M.A. in Anthropology from Pune University, and a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Delhi University. She trained as a teacher of yoga at the Kaivalyadham Yoga Institute. She is a practitioner of vipassana meditation and a teacher of hatha yoga. She is the manager of Kumryunsa Temple, a Dharma teacher at Yongjusa and Jogyesa Temples, and a lecturer at the Buddhist College of Jogyesa Temple in Korea.

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Bhikkhuni Tathaaloka is a founding leader of Dhammadharini (Women Upholding the Dhamma) and the Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage in Northern California, where the first Theravada *bhikkhuni sangha* and first *bhikkhuni* community of the forest traditions arose in North America. She was the first Western women to be appointed to serve as a *bhikkhuni pavattini/upajjhaya* (preceptor) in the renewal of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha. Her special research interest is comparative, text-critical, and historical studies of *bhikkhuni vinaya* and the history (her-story) of the ancient *bhikkhuni sangha* around the world.

Emma Tomalin is a senior lecturer in religious studies at the University of Leeds and is the director of the Centre for Religion and Public Life. Generally her research interests are focused in the areas of gender and religion, religion and development; and religion and environmentalism. She is co-editor of The Routledge Research in Religion and Development series.

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Thich Nu Phuoc Uyen was born in South Vietnam in a non-religious family. She came Australia at the age of 16. During her first year at university, she helped to catalog books in a Buddhist library and she fell in love with the books she found there. Nine months later, she took vows as a Buddhist nun. She completed her Bachelor's degree in Optometry at the University of Melbourne in 2006 and is currently a practicing optometrist. In 2007, she founded Hoa Nghiem Vietnamese Language School and has been the vice-principal of the school until now. In 2014, she was awarded a Languages Teaching Scholarship to study for a Master's degree in primary education.

Carol L. Winkelmann, Ph.D., is a linguist and professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio; practices Buddhism in the Karma Kagyu tradition; and is a board member of Sakyadhita USA. She teaches a course on gender and violence and has published books and articles on women, language, violence, and religion. She is currently writing about Buddhist women's leadership and about conflict in social media.

Malia Dominica Wong is a lecturer in the Humanities Department at Chaminade University, Honolulu. She has been a student and practitioner of Buddhism since the early 1980's.

Fen-jin Wu was born in Taipei, Taiwan, in 1969. She graduated from the Department of Pharmacy at Taipei Medical University in 1992 and then earned a Master's in Pharmacy in 1994. She is a licensed pharmacist and worked for pharmaceutical company for ten years. Questioning the meaning of work and life, in 2007 she took a break to study and practice Buddhism at Dharma Drum Buddhist College. After completing an M.A in Buddhist Studies there in DDBC in 2009, she began a doctoral program in Religious Studies at National Chengchi University in 2011, with a focus on Buddhism, and is currently in the fourth year.

Rotraut (Jampa) Wurst studied Protestant Theology and Comparative Studies in Religion, receiving a Ph.D. from the Freie Universität in Berlin. Her dissertation research on Tibetan Buddhist Nuns and the Sakyadhita Network was published as *Identität im Exil*. In 2001, she founded the Institute for Further Development, Meditation, and Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in Altenholz, Germany. In 2006, she founded Hilfe für Alt und Jung, where she teaches, motivates, and supports young people and disabled adults. Since 2013, her focus has been on motivating people with high IQs who have problems in school. She is a lifetime member of Sakyadhita and has attended nine Sakyadhita conferences, where she facilitated a variety of workshops, especially on Dharma rap. In 2013, she was instrumental in establishing a national branch of Sakyadhita in Germany.

Hyangsoon Yi is a professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia. She

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