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Sakyadhita Newsletter - (Winter 2002)

7th SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE Reflections by Jacynthe Bigras

The 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held from July 11 to 17 in Taipei, Taiwan, was a source of inspiration and motivation for women worldwide. The conference was held in the picturesque hills of Taipei County at Huafan Buddhist University.

The conference, held every other year, attracts more and more lay and ordained friends, and this year was no exception, with over 300 people attending panel presentations by local and international delegates. The Bhiksuni Sangha in Taiwan is well-known for its high level of education, training, and social engagement, was a great model and host for this Sakyadhita Conference. The daily schedule consisted of meditation, morning and afternoon panel presentations, followed by a question and answer period, and discussion groups. Evenings included chanting and cultural presentations. The morning meditation and early evening chanting were led by a different tradition each day.

The theme of the Taipei Conference was “Bridging Worlds,” which was expanded in the morning and afternoon panels. Over a period of six days we heard “The Buddhist Women's Movement in the New Century.” On the last day of the conference, a representative from each discussion group presented the main issues and ideas discussed, a thoughtful addition to the conference schedule, furthering mutual understanding across traditions and cultures. The conference had many memorable moments, such as the unexpected visit of the 92-year-old founder of Huafan University, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan. Her simple and sincere words of encouragement moved us all. Other treats included a Flying Sky Lantern demonstration, hearing Tibetan traditional folk songs, Korean p’ansori (oral narrative), and the Lotus Ashram Chorus. The last evening and closing ceremony of the conference were blessed with a candle ceremony and chanting of dedication of merit in different languages.

The Taiwan Plan of Action and the Taipei Declaration were presented during the closing ceremony. Later in this issue you will find these proclamations that will serve as guiding principles for this newly organized branch of Sakyadhita International.

After the conference, nearly 80 participants enjoyed a conference tour that was most inspiring. One of our first treats was a delicious vegetarian banquet sponsored by the Chinese Young Buddhist Association, before going to the National Palace Museum. We next went southeast along the breathtaking coast line of Taiwan, and on to Hualien, to visit the world headquarters of

Tzu Chi society. There we were honored by words of welcome from the founder, Venerable Zhengyen. An overnight stay at Sheongtze Monastery in the Taroko National Park and visit to a Buddhist orphanage will long be remembered.

From the greeting volunteers who greeted participants at the airport to the cafeteria cooks, the Taiwanese organizers and volunteers exemplified sincere welcome, generosity and kindness. Deep gratitude and thanks to all the local and international organizers, volunteers, and participants. This conference has created strong bridges of international communication, ideas, action and hope. Let's keep these bridges open to lead the way to the 8th Conference in Korea in 2004!

COPING WITH LONELINESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BUDDHIST APPROACHES TO MENTAL SUFFERING by Dr. Megan Muramoto

As a psychiatrist, I am concerned with my patients' wellness. It is sometimes my job to sit and talk. At other times, medications may be required. A psychiatrist is a physician who helps people cope with psychological pain and distressing issues such as loneliness. I offer talk therapy and may prescribe medications for severe depression, anxiety, and psychosis. The psychology of the patient is part of a broader picture that encompasses the physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the whole person. Physical wellness is reflected in healthy practices such as eating nutritious meals, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, and avoiding cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs. It is also appropriately treating medical illnesses like pneumonia and cancer.

Psychological wellness is feeling good about oneself and others. One is able to work and play, have meaningful relationships with others, and can tolerate the vicissitudes of life. Spiritual wellness, to me, has to do with developing a sense of harmony with the universe. One works towards a transcendence of the self, opening to a higher level of awareness and understanding of the true nature of things.

As a psychiatrist, I help people with their physical and psychological problems, but it is not in my realm of expertise to help them with spiritual dilemmas. For guidance with these issues, I must refer them to a religious leader. Whichever religious practice an individual chooses is fine, for the goals of religious practice seem similar – to transform the one's heart through spirituality. However, spiritual practices are often impeded by chronic, unresolved psychological issues such as depression, anger, psychosis, or other unhealthy mind states. A certain level of psychological wellness is required for spiritual development. Of course, I encourage their spiritual development and will hopefully work synergistically with their spiritual teacher.

Now, getting back to why I am talking about loneliness. Basically, I see a confusion of people in the West using Buddhism as a means to alleviate psychological suffering, such as loneliness, rather than practicing it spiritually as a means to achieve Enlightenment. I tend to believe that just as a child needs enough proper nutrition to grow, one must have a certain amount of psychological health for spiritual development. Sometimes I cannot sit to meditate, because I am distracted by an unpleasant incident. Methods to calm the mind and cope with disturbing mental distractions can prove effective not only to one's mental health, but also in one's spiritual life.

Here I would like to consider the similarities and differences between the Buddhist and psychological approaches to the human misery of loneliness and how they can work together to cope with this common ailment. Loneliness is a very individual experience and therefore is not easy to define. Some people feel loneliness intensely and are immobilized by it. Others deny ever having experienced it. It can be embarrassing to admit, but almost everyone has felt lonely at some point in their life. In general, loneliness is an unpleasant emotional experience that occurs when people are not satisfied with their connections with others. Most people have a basic need to relate with other human beings. We are defined as social beings and seek interpersonal intimacy. We want to love and be loved, to have our existence and our strengths acknowledged, to laugh and enjoy life with others. When we are lonely we wonder whether anyone cares if we live or die. Am I accepted? Do I accept myself? Am I unloved or loveable? If we feel rejected, needy, or anxious, we often experience this despair physically. The skin may feel cold, the chest tight, the energy sapped. People experience loneliness differently.

And there are different kinds of loneliness. Social loneliness occurs when one's access to others is cut off, for example, when bedridden, deaf, blind, moving to a new area, or going away to school. Emotional loneliness occurs when there is a disruption in relationships, for example, when a family member dies, we break up with a lover, or lose a friend. A miscommunication can lead us to feel misunderstood and unaccepted. There is also existential loneliness, for example, when we feel adrift, disconnected, wondering what is the meaning of life? Why are we here? Is there a purpose to life?

The important issue is how do we deal with loneliness? Coping with loneliness requires effective problem solving. The first step is to recognize that something is wrong and identify that we are lonely. If this mental state is disturbing enough, the next step is to consider what to do about it: "What are my options?" We can dwell on the negative feeling, seek out a friend to discuss it with, or distract ourselves by going for a walk. Like a chess game, we can consider each move and its consequences. If we choose to do nothing, the outcome will probably be to remain lonely and perhaps become depressed. If we contact a friend who is unresponsive, we may be "back to square one" and still lonely. Or the friend may be responsive, supportive, and available to do something together, relieving the loneliness.

After identifying the problem, assessing whether it warrants action, considering the options, and considering the consequences of each option, the final step is choose the best solution to solve the problem and act on it. If our hearing is failing, we get a hearing aid. If we are isolated at home with a broken leg, we can ask a friend to visit. The solution to social loneliness is simply to reach out to others. When we are unable to resolve matters ourselves, that is the time to seek a friend, a spiritual counselor, or a professional therapist.

A psychiatrist uses various psychotherapeutic techniques. Different kinds of therapy may be useful in coping with loneliness. All of them involve creating a meaningful relationship with the therapist. This evolves out of a non-judgmental, caring exchange between the patient and a therapist who is totally present and able to give appropriate feedback. Sometimes, the approach involves careful examination of past experiences to uncover the source of the distress. At times, it involves gaining insight into a core incident. At other time, it involves looking at our

relationships and examining how we connect with people. We can investigate how we make friendships and how we retain them, checking to see whether we tend to withdraw or intrude.

Along with the psychotherapeutic approach, I provide education on understanding emotions and how to cope with them. This approach is based on the principle that moods are created by thoughts. A bad feeling is the result of thinking illogically and negatively. So, if we change our thinking, we can change our mood. Consider the following sequence: An event occurs, we perceive the event, we attach meaning to our perception, and then we experience an emotional response. If we feel unhappy or miserable, we can check to see whether we perhaps misperceived or misunderstood the event. Although we cannot change the event, we can change the way we view and value it. We learn that emotions come and go. This helps us develop patience to let the emotions pass, rather than reacting impulsively. We also learn to be responsible for our emotions. Others do not cause our moods and are not responsible to alleviating our suffering. We have more control over our emotions than we think and can learn to soothe yourself.

We can still feel bad, however, with correct perception and thinking. If we have lost a loved one, sadness is a normal response. But instead of suffering, genuine sadness can be a rich sense of knowing, caring, loving, and letting go.

From a Buddhist perspective, a sense of loneliness arises from attachment and a false concept of self. It is an unskillful mind state that results from a limited awareness. Where there is no self, there is nothing to cling to. Buddhism talks about interconnectedness and the interdependence of all phenomena. This experiential awareness is the goal of Buddhist practice and is termed awakening. The clinging to self and attachment that causes loneliness are transcended.

The first step in psychology is to take responsibility. This corresponds to the Buddha's teaching on self-responsibility: "Be lamps unto yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Look not for refuge to anyone beside yourself." The second step, the process of problem solving, corresponds to the first two of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths – life is full of dissatisfactions caused by attachments and misperceptions. The third step, applying mindfulness and insight, involves investigating and experiencing unpleasant emotions, rather than simply reacting to them. Here, Buddhism goes beyond psychotherapeutic exercises by prescribing the Eight-fold Path to end and prevent suffering.

But Buddhism does not stop at the alleviation of psychological pain. The Buddhist path also promotes compassion, wisdom, and equanimity more profoundly than is considered appropriate for a psychotherapist. Cultivating compassion, loving kindness, joy, and equanimity expand the vision of psychological wellness to even deeper experiences of inner peace and love – making us more present and available for others. These empowering practices generate stability, understanding, and a sense of psychological freedom. Simultaneously, they act as a catalysts to healthy connections with others – a natural corrective to loneliness. <http://uk.my.yahoo.com/>

Member's Forum

7TH SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUDDHIST WOMEN: Taipei Declaration

We, the 326 participants from 27 countries, meeting at the 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held at Huafan University from July 11 to 17, 2002, issue the following declaration:

In a post-September 11 world rife with terrorism, militarism, hunger, poverty, and exploitation, now more than ever, we Buddhist women strongly express our intention to fulfill our commitment to create a culture of peace and nonviolence.

In line with the new global ethic of ensuring human equality, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to the ideals of equality and solidarity among women and men of the world, reaching across boundaries of ethnicity, language, religion, class, and gender.

Taking inspiration from the thousands of well-educated, socially active Buddhist women in Taiwan, we express our primary ideals as follows:

- * To strengthen the Sakyadhita alliance of Buddhist women around the world to work for peace, harmony, and social justice
- * To explore applications of Buddhism in the new global context
- * To empower Buddhist women and facilitate Buddhist women's contributions to world peace
- * To foster equality and solidarity among the Buddhist traditions
- * To reenvision Buddhism along the lines of the new Global Ethic ensuring gender equality
- * To promote for social justice and equitable sharing of resources
- * To work for the institution of the Bhiksuni Sangha throughout the world
- * To increase respect for women's spiritual capacities
- * To create conditions for women's fruitful study and practice of the Dharma
- * To build bridges of communications with the world's leading Buddhist organization to cooperate on issues of mutual interest.

SAKYADHITA TAIPEI PLAN OF ACTION: July 17, 2002

Building on the 7th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, we feel that it is vital to identify Buddhist women's primary goals and priorities, and to formulate specific and concrete proposals to implement these goals and ideals. We therefore intend to join our efforts and implement a plan of action that includes the following mission goals:

- * To create greater opportunities for Buddhist women's education and Dharma practice
- * To work to abolish trafficking and other forms of sexual and economic exploitation of girls and women throughout the world
- * To explore appropriate applications of ethics in the contemporary world for women, both lay and ordained
- * To foster inner transformation and compassionate social action
- * To identify specific strategies to achieve social justice and an equitable sharing of resources
- * To encourage the flow of information and resources between more affluent Buddhist countries and organizations to help support Buddhist sisters and brothers in less fortunate countries
- * To work for the advancement of Buddhist women worldwide, transcending national and ethnic boundaries
- * To engage in dialogue with the world's leading Buddhist organizations to discuss issues of concern to Buddhist women
- * To expedite the institution of *bhiksuni* ordination in countries where it is not available
- * To work to provide educational and vocational training alternatives for the empowerment of women, especially in developing countries
- * To encourage self-reliance among women, consciousness raising, leadership training, and study groups, and the welfare of families and children
- * To develop the branches of Sakyadhita as a network for sharing knowledge and resources
- * To encourage research on Buddhist women's history, Vinaya, meditation, and other issues of vital concern to Buddhist women
- * To formulate specific research projects and identify funding sources to finance these projects
- * To establish working committees to translate Sakyadhita's specific mission goals into action
- * To establish a Buddhist women's center in Bodhgaya, site of the Buddha's enlightenment
- * To organize a convocation of leading Vinaya scholars under the auspices of Sakyadhita to discuss the institution of the Bhiksuni Sangha throughout the world
- * To establish a strong Sakyadhita Taiwan branch, as well as effective branches in other countries.

GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL & LOCAL BRANCHES

Organization. National and Local Branches are established to help coordinate Sakyadhita membership on the national level and local level, and to organize activities that are in harmony with the objectives of Sakyadhita International. A National or Local Branch may be established by contacting Sakyadhita International and informing the Executive Committee of its intention to establish a branch. Not all members of National or Local Branches need to be members of Sakyadhita, but Executive Committee members, National and Local Representatives, and members of the steering committee (if any) should be members of Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women.

Rights. National and Local Branches have the authority to raise funds, encourage membership, establish offices, reproduce the Sakyadhita International newsletter, translate the newsletter into national languages, publish National or Local newsletters, collect membership fees and donations, elect a national Executive Committee, and organize activities on the national level, including conferences, retreats, teachings, fundraisers, and other events.

Responsibilities. National and Local Branches have the responsibility to ensure that activities organized on the national or local level, particularly publications, are in harmony with the objectives of Sakyadhita International. In case of any questions, National and Local Executive Committee members and the general membership have the responsibility to consult with Sakyadhita International in writing or electronically prior to taking action.

SAKYADHITA SAN DIEGO BRANCH STARTED

The maxim “Think globally, act locally” serves as a guideline for Sakyadhita’s work. To illustrate this maxim, a new local chapter began in November 2002: Sakyadhita San Diego. A group of 18 women, some arriving from as far away as Los Angeles, met at the home of Bok-lim Kim in La Jolla, California, to discuss Dharma, meditation, and plans for social action.

The group’s first initiative was to begin a Buddhist studies group for women. Members requested Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo to lead the discussion of Shantideva’s text, *The Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*. The study group held its first meeting in December and plans to meet monthly.

The second initiative was to create a mailing list to facilitate networking among interested Buddhist women in the San Diego area. This mailing list will be used to contact women about their special skills and interests. Already Carole Zavala has volunteered to help Sakyadhita with organization development and grant writing.

The third initiative was to identify social action projects to benefit Buddhist women in developing countries. Already efforts are underway to gain corporate sponsorship for education programs in the Indian Himalayas for the year 2003. These programs will focus on AIDS, substance abuse, dental hygiene, and trafficking in women and girls.

New members are welcome. If you are interested in joining or supporting the projects of this group, or would like to learn more about starting a local branch in your area, please contact Sakyadhita International.

Reflections on the 7th International Conference from Dr. Yuchen Li

The 7th International Conference on Buddhist Women, organized by Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women in cooperation with Huafan University, was held in Taipei, Taiwan, from July 11-17, 2002. The conference was attended by 327 scholars and distinguished guests from 26 countries who gathered to discuss the topic, "Bridging Worlds." This conference was a venue to debate, in an atmosphere of international friendship, the roles of Buddhist women in contemporary society. For seven days, through paper presentations, small group discussions, meditation, and chanting, participants from different Buddhist traditions exchanged knowledge, ideas, and experiences in a warm spirit of sharing and dialogue. After the conference, from July 17-19, delegates visited the Palace Museum and various monasteries around Taiwan. These experiences left them deeply impressed with the vitality of Taiwanese nuns.

Since its founding in 1987, Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women has been devoted to promoting research on women in Buddhism and to establishing full ordination for nuns. As the major organization of Buddhist women in the world, Sakyadhita works across the boundaries of different schools, cultures, and disciplines. In accordance with this mission, the organization had already held six international conferences in India, Sri Lanka, the Himalayas, and Southeast Asia.

For many years, Buddhist nuns in Taiwan have received considerable world attention for their high standards and active engagement in society, becoming an important model for women in the Tibetan and Theravada traditions, as they seek gender equality, especially access to full monastic ordination. The Sakyadhita conference in Taiwan was an opportunity to highlight their achievements.

This International Conference was the first of its kind to be held in Taiwan, and in this sense, was therefore particularly meaningful. Members of prominent Taiwanese Buddhist organizations, such as the Taiwanese Association of Buddhist Nuns, the Lotus Buddhist Ashram, Luminary Buddhist Nuns Association, Hongshi Buddhist Institute, Foguangshan, Yuanzhao Temple, and Jingci Temple participated. By participating in the Sakyadhita conference, Taiwanese Buddhist women demonstrated their solidarity with other Buddhist women around the world.

A group of eight nuns from Vietnam attended, as well as a team of more than 45 Korean nuns and laypeople from Joong Ang Sangha University and the Korean Nuns Association. The 8th Sakyadhita conference will be hosted in Korea in July 2004, so this team came to represent Korea and make advance arrangements. The mutual understanding and concern expressed by the

attendees was facilitated by the simultaneous translation of the talks into Chinese, English, and Korean. The attention paid to communications was an important milestone and encouraged increased participation by women from East Asian Buddhist countries.

During the conference, 55 papers were presented by 50 speakers: one each from England, Spain, Japan, Bhutan and Cambodia; two speakers each from Germany, Nepal, Myanmar, India, Thailand and Italy; three speakers from Korea; four from Vietnam; five from Sri Lanka; nine from the United States; and seventeen from Taiwan. Many of the speakers held advanced academic degrees, and many were professors and scholars. The improved educational qualifications of Buddhist women since Sakyadhita began its work in 1987 demonstrates the direct relationship between the educational background and self-confidence among Buddhist women. The Sakyadhita conferences, which give women the right and opportunity to speak at an academic meeting, are evidence of contemporary Buddhist women's improved status in the sphere of religious studies and society as a whole.

One example is Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a noted scholar from Thailand. In 1991, she organized the 2nd International Conference on Buddhist Women in Bangkok especially to educate people in Thailand about the false perception that "there is no full ordination for Buddhist women in the world." In 2001, she became a nun, and is now known as Sramanerika Dhammananda. She is proving to the Thai Sangha the potential that nuns have and is actively encouraging the local population to discuss women's religious life. Of the papers presented, 21 discussed Buddhist women in Taiwan. In addition, seven papers discussed the issue of ordination for nuns, notably the paper of Ven. Heng-ching Shih. The Taiwanese nuns who attended the conference could not help comparing their own favorable conditions with those of nuns in other countries. They expressed concern and sympathy toward Dharma sisters who are unable to obtain full ordination.

In an atmosphere of freely exchanging ideas, opinions were divided on some topics. In one instance, Taiwanese nuns expressed both admiration and trepidation toward the research of foreign scholars who carry out field work in Taiwan. For example, Sra. Yeshe Choekyi Lhamo, a German nun studying at Australia National University presented a controversial thesis concerning the tendency of Taiwanese nuns to see amenorrhea (the cessation of menses) as a sign of spiritual attainment. Another example was the presentation of Stefania Travagnin from Italy, who researched the history of Yuantong Chan Temple in Zhonghe. She gave this temple high praise as the first nunnery in Taiwan, with a hundred years of history. However, her presentation failed to mention the fact that this temple has become a haven for stray dogs and has therefore become an object of scorn by local people. Both these presentations gave rise to lively discussions and questions in the conference hall. The Sakyadhita Conference thus raised many important questions concerning the process of cultural exchange, the cultural adaptations of the Buddha's teachings, and the inversion of self-image in the eyes of others.

July 11 Morning: Opening Ceremony of the 7th International Conference on Buddhist Women

Dr. Weizhao Chen, president of National Taiwan University, and Dr. Sun Ma, president of Huafan University, delivered words of welcome. They highly praised the outstanding

contributions of Taiwanese nuns and recognized the increase in scholarly research on Buddhist women. Lu Xiulian, Taiwan's Vice President, and Ven. Tenzin Palmo, a British nun practicing in the Tibetan tradition, spoke about women and social change, basing their presentations on their personal experiences of gender discrimination. Ven. Tenzin Palmo reviewed 18 years of Buddhist women's history in Europe and America and the struggles of Buddhist nuns, noting the significant contributions of the conferences organized by Sakyadhita, which have been attended by hundreds of women over the years.

July 11 Afternoon: "Understanding Buddhist Women Around the World"

Representatives from a variety of countries introduced the situations of Buddhist women in their localities, ranging from a broad range of opportunities to experiences of war, poverty, and marginalization. Representatives from countries as far afield as Bhutan, Cambodia, India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam shared the history of Buddhist women in their traditions, as well as contemporary conditions. There was a shared consensus about the necessity of educating nuns and re-establishing full ordination opportunities for nuns.

July 12 Morning: "Buddhist Women of Taiwan"

Ven. Chuandao introduced the history of full monastic ordination for nuns in the Taiwanese Sangha. Ven. Wuyin talked about the value of monastic discipline from the point of view of practice. Ven. Cirong discussed the objectives and activities of Taiwanese nuns who are active internationally. Ven. Yikong emphasized nuns' equal responsibility for spreading the Dharma. Dr. Lu Huixin described the cooperative efforts of lay and ordained women in the experience of Tzuchi Foundation. Lin Rongzhi, representing the organization of Buddhist temples, called on Taiwanese nunneries to take responsibility for setting up a systematic ordination process.

At noon, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, the founder of Huafan University, entered the conference hall and encouraged the conference attendees saying, "The responsibilities taken on by nuns are becoming more and more important, and so nuns must become every more dedicated." To illustrate this point, when Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo came to Taiwan to receive the Triple Altar Ordination in 1982 and studied at the Lotus Buddhist Ashram for six months, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan encouraged her saying, "There is nothing that cannot be accomplished by nuns." Taking this conviction to heart, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo overcame many difficulties to help found Sakyadhita: International Association of Buddhist Women. Accomplishments like this testify to what nuns can achieve.

July 12 Afternoon: "Bridging the Gender Gap, Transforming Institution"

Ven. Minh Hue (Vietnam) compared the Theravada and Mahayana Vinaya traditions with respect to Vinaya practice and concluded that full ordination for women in the Theravada tradition is consonant with the spirit of equality for all human beings enunciated by the Buddha. Ven. Zhaohui (Taiwan) introduced the Taiwanese movement aimed at abrogating the Eight Chief Rules (*gurudharmas*), emphasizing that a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence among the nuns is a major obstacle. Dr. Mariko Namba Walter (Japan/USA) presented her study on

Guanyin's gender transformation in medieval Japanese Buddhism. Dr. Hema Goonatilake (Sri Lanka) discussed the situations of nuns, widows, and abandoned women in Cambodian society.

July 13 Morning: "Bridging the World's Religions"

Dr. Malia Dominica Wong (U.S.A.), a Catholic nun, pointed out the commonalities among the world's religions and "the language of heart," which serves as a bridge of warmth and mutual respect among all human beings. Ms. Hawwa Morales Soto (Spain) compared Sufism to Buddhism, citing meditation, music, and humor as major paths to the truth. Dr. Maria Reis Habito, International Program Director of the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, demonstrated how a Christian can reaffirm his/her own beliefs after coming in contact with Buddhism, and explained how the spirit of compassion supports social engagement. At noon, Ven. Jingliang, President of the Chinese Buddhist Temple Association, came to the conference hall to greet and congratulate the conference attendees.

July 13 Afternoon: "Bridging the Buddhist Traditions"

Ven. Sukdham Sunim (Korea) presented a detailed analysis of the first Buddhist women in India and China, based on Pali and Chinese sources. Ven. Lieu Phap (Vietnam) presented research to show how Theravada Buddhism was reintroduced to Vietnam in 1940 and how the Vietnamese Sangha began to incorporate both Theravada and Mahayana practice beginning in 1981. Elisa Nesossi (Italy) explained the value of the ordained monastic Sangha, from the perspectives of ethics, practice, and ritual. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (U.S.A.) spoke about the importance of understanding and solidarity among Buddhist women and the benefits of mutual cooperation among lay and ordained women.

July 14 Morning: "Bridging Monastic Ideals & Everyday Life"

Ven. Tenzin Palmo (U.K.) discussed monastic discipline and practice in contemporary society. Gina Cogan (U.S.A.) presented her research on the life of Bunchi, a 17th-century Japanese nun, and her efforts to transmit the bodhisattva precepts. Ven. Xiuci (Taiwan) reviewed Huafan University under the leadership of Ven. Shig Hiu Wan and its international activities. Sra. Molini Rai (Myanmar) introduced the social engagement of Daw Oo Zun, a 20th-century nun in Myanmar.

July 14 Afternoon: "Bridging the Vinaya Traditions"

Dr. Kusuma Devendra (Sri Lanka) discussed the common aspects of discipline for nuns in the different Buddhist traditions. Roseanne Freese (U.S.A.) traced in detail the route traveled by Sri Lanka nuns in their successful effort to transmit full monastic ordination to nuns in China. Ven. Hengqing (Taiwan) called on Taiwanese nuns to transmit to the Theravadin and Tibetan traditions the lineage of full ordination for nuns that has been carefully preserved in China and Taiwan. Ven. Yikong (Taiwan) appealed for international cooperation to make this transmission possible.

July 15 Morning: “Bridging Contemplation & Social Action”

Ven. Zichuan (Taiwan) introduced the objectives and achievements of the Buddhist Luminary Nuns’ Community. This led to an open discussion about social welfare education. Dr. Tomomi Ito (Japan) discussed the low social status of Thai nuns, a problem that is rooted in their ambiguous status vis-a-vis the monks’ order, noting that nuns’ lack of access to full ordination works as an obstacle to their practice and independence. Mrs. Ranjani de Silva (Sri Lanka) reported that once Sri Lankan women began to receive full monastic precepts, they also became interested in receiving training in social service. Ven. Zhaohui (Taiwan) reviewed the innovative work of Buddhist nuns in defending animal rights through the Taiwanese Life Conservationist Association. In a multi-media presentation, Ven. Xiuyi (Taiwan) introduced the activities of the Chinese Buddhist Youth Association.

July 15 Afternoon: “Bridging Generations”

Dr. Hema Goonatilake (Sri Lanka) pointed out that Buddhism helped Sri Lankan society to recognize and respect the value of aged women, although this tradition is currently declining due to urbanization. Ven. Neungin Sunim (Korea) analyzed recent social welfare policies in Korea that have encouraged Buddhist organizations and monastic institutions to promote training and social activism among nuns. Dr. Elise DeVido (U.S.A.) explained the different ways that Taiwanese Buddhists are involved in society, and pointed out the dilemma nuns face as they strive to balance social engagement and religious practice. Ven. Renlang Shih (Taiwan) described her relationship with her master, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, and discussed the significance of “open minded” education for nuns.

July 16 Morning: “Bridging Value Systems: Ancient & Modern”

Dr. Yixun Huang (Taiwan/U.S.A.) presented the life stories and practice experience of women, ancient and modern, in the Pure Land school. Stefania Travagnin (Italy) discussed her research on the founding of Yuantong Temple in Zhonghe and the work of its founder, Ven. Miaoqing. Ven. Bongak Sunim (Korea) explained the guiding principles of Joong-Ang Sangha University and its influence on Korean nuns’ education. Sra. Yeshe Chokyi Lhamo (Australia) introduced her field research, which focused on how Taiwanese nuns use amenorrhoea to arbitrate their own practice and deny their gender.

July 16 Afternoon: “Bridging Study & Practice”

Weiyi Polly Zheng (Taiwan) explained the motivation and research methodology in her Ph.D. thesis, which focused on the Eight Chief Rules for nuns. Dr. Yuzhen Li (Taiwan) compared the approaches of leading nuns in Taiwan, including Ven. Zhengyan, Ven. Shig Hiu Wan, Ven. Hengqing, Ven. Zhaohui, and Ven. Fuhui. Qianhui Yang (Taiwan) explored the relationship between ordained and lay women at Zhongtai Chan Temple. Sr. Srisalab Upamai (Thailand)

introduced the education programs for nuns at Mahapajapati Theri College in Thailand. Finally, Sra. Sherab Zangmo (Tibet) discussed the lives of illustrious female practitioners in the Tibetan tradition.

July 17 Morning: Closing Ceremony

At the conclusion of the conference, Sakyadhita members expressed their appreciation to Ven. Shig Hiu Wan and the staff of Huafan University for their superb hosting of this historic gathering of Buddhist women around the world. Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo presented Ven. Renlang Shih with a Sakyadhita flag to proclaim the establishment of a new Sakyadhita Taiwan branch. Ven Renlang Shih then presented Ven. Bongak Sunim with a Sakyadhita flag to symbolize passing the honor of hosting the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, which will be held in Korea in July 2004. The gathering ended with dedications of merit, chanted in Pali, Chinese, Korean, Tibetan, and Vietnamese, followed by a sumptuous vegetarian feast.

(English translation: Stefania Travagnin)

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