

Commemorative Essay Offered on the Occasion of the 2600th Anniversary of the Bhikkhunī Sangha & 30th Anniversary of the First Contemporary Theravāda Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjās

## Honoring Those Worthy of Honor

Contributions of the Late Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra and Other Early Preceptors Reviving the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha through the Groundbreaking Ordinations of Buddhist Women in the 1980s

This writing is inspired by gratitude. According to traditional Theravāda Buddhist calendars, this year, from the 2016 to 2017 full moon of September, we celebrate and commemorate the 2600 Year Anniversary<sup>1</sup> of both the founding of our Bhikkhunī Sangha and with it the fulfilment of the Buddha's intention to have a Fourfold Community of knowledgeable, skilled and experienced disciples both male and female, monastics and householders. Within this centenary anniversary, there are two important smaller anniversaries. In fact, it is due to the events for which we remember these smaller anniversaries that we now also remember the greater one. This is a cause of tremendous gratitude, as without these events, the 2600th anniversary of the Bhikkhunī Sangha would most likely be lost in the mists of time, unremembered and uncommemorated. What are these smaller anniversaries?

This year is also 30-year anniversary of the founding of Sakyadhita International Buddhist Women's Association, and the 30-year Anniversary of leading elder Theravāda bhikkhu teachers beginning to give the *Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā* (the "Going Forth" to the Sangha as a Woman Sāmaṇa in Training), the traditional canonical first stage of ordination into the Sangha, to women aspiring to enter the Buddhist monastic Sangha. Coincidentally, this year is also the 30-year anniversary of my own entry into monastic life, and 20-year anniversary of

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<sup>1</sup> The dating of the 2600th anniversary of the Bhikkhunī Sangha and the establishment of the Fourfold Community of the Buddha between the September full moons of 2016 and 2017 is in accordance with Theravāda Buddhist calendar dates for the Buddha's Parinibbāna. The foundation of the Bhikkhunī Sangha five years after the Buddha first began to teach appears in the canonical Pāli texts in the *Kuddhaka Nikāya* collection's *Therī Apadāna* book, in the "Bhaddā Kapilānī Therī Apadāna" chapter. The Sri Lanka Theravāda Buddhist Sangha remembers and commemorates the founding of the Bhikkhunī Sāsana on the day of the September full moon, known as Binara Poya in the Sinhala language.

my bhikkhunī ordination ten years later, when the bhikkhunī revival in Buddhism was just beginning to really gain ground.

The late Venerable Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra Mahānāyaka Thero, chief prelate for the Sri Lankan Sangha of the Western Hemisphere, served as preceptor (*upajjhāya*) for my bhikkhunī ordination, with the understanding that bhikkhus are allowed by Vinaya to give bhikkhunīs *upasampadā* (full ordination) when bhikkhunīs are not available.<sup>2</sup> As a young American, then in my 20s, to speak in the language of my generation, I kind of knew this was a big deal and important in some ways, but did not really understand the scope or the history of what we were involved in at that time; so I took a lot for granted. Over the years, as I've learned more and have come to understand more about what we were all experiencing in context, my gratitude has swelled and grown enormously—like a fruit that becomes golden and sweet in the late summertime.

My bhikkhunī ordination in 1997 together with Theravāda bhikkhunīs from Sri Lanka and Nepal was not the first in which Theravāda bhikkhunīs were ordained in North America. I too knew that nearly ten years before—in fact the year I myself went forth into monastic life—our late venerable women monastics' torchbearer Ayyā Khemā and others had taken the brave step to go ahead with full bhikkhunī ordination in Southern California. So, who were these others? I was interested to find out, for if any of the bhikkhunīs of the Theravāda tradition still existed, we would have mahātherīs, "great elders" of more than twenty years standing, among us. For, after living, practicing and teaching for years with cancer, luminary Venerable Ayyā Khemā Bhikkhunī herself passed away the very year of my own bhikkhunī ordination, after a little less than ten years as a bhikkhunī. Not much was established for bhikkhunīs back then 20-30 years ago, and I had heard and read that some of the first group of early bhikkhunīs had disrobed due to lack of support. There was no Alliance for Bhikkhunīs at that point, and it wasn't clear until a few years later that the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha would really take hold and begin to gain ground and establish itself in the way it has.

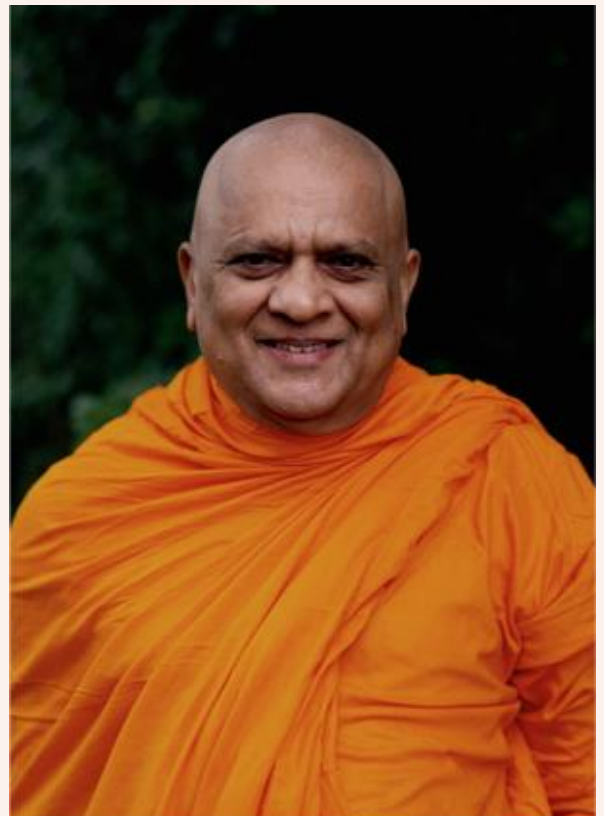
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<sup>2</sup> My ordination, together with Ven. Sumetthā/Sumitrā Therī from Sri Lanka and Ven Rujā Bhikkhunī from Nepal (the latter now returned to lay life), was originally planned to be a dual ordination; however, on the day of the event, one of the five bhikkhunīs needed for the bhikkhunī quorum fell gravely ill. In the absence of the bhikkhunī quorum, with around 200 other Sangha members gathered, the Sri Lankan bhikkhu sangha alone gave the ordination with the gathered bhikkhunīs and international Sangha members as witnesses. The gathered bhikkhunīs, including preceptor and training teachers, did give preliminary training and examination, and the ordination occurred with their agreement and the *chanda* (permission and blessing) of the ill bhikkhunī.

It wasn't until years later, in fact until after he'd passed away, that I began to learn of the important role my then-late preceptor Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and my still-living vice-preceptor (*Anusāvana Ācariya*), the Ven. Dr. Walpola Piyananda, played in that groundbreaking 1988 ordination in which twelve women of Theravāda traditions from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Thailand, Germany and the United States requested and received the higher ordination, the full *Bhikkhunī Upasampadā*.

Interested to learn more now at this significant time—the historical juncture of our 2600th Bhikkhunī Sangha Anniversary—I posted a favorite photo of my late venerable preceptor by photographer Don Farber<sup>3</sup> on [my Facebook wall](#).

This led to a friend request with a note from a Thai woman in Southern California, a former lawyer named Chutima Vucharatavintara, who informed me that Bhante Ratanasāra was her ordination preceptor too. What a surprise! I wasn't aware of having such close (same preceptor) Thai Dhamma sisters.



Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra, 1988 Los Angeles

Chutima quickly allayed all doubts by sending me photos of her *Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā* ("Going Forth" as a woman Sāmana-in-training) with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra as her preceptor at Dharma Vijaya in Los Angeles in May on Vesāka Day of 1988. The photos of her *pabbajjā* radiated an awesome mood as expressed on the faces of the very many leading monastic Sangha members of various traditions I could see in attendance. Clearly this was a momentous occasion.

In the photographs shared, I also noticed two other red earth-saffron and brown-robed Theravāda women monastic onlookers in the audience. Inquiring after them, to my further great surprise, I learned that Chutima (*Sāmaṇerī*

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Don Farber of [Don Farber Photography](#) for his Dana contribution of two photos, of my preceptor and of the Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs at Hsi Lai, for this article.

Dhammamittā)’s pabbajjā ordination was groundbreaking, as it was the first in gathering such widespread Sangha support and agreement in Southern California and in the United States. But it may not have been the very first after all. In fact it appears to have been one of the first (plural) groundbreaking Theravāda women’s sāmaṇerī ordinations offered either by Bhante Ratanasāra himself, or by eminent senior Theravāda bhikkhu teachers in which he served in a supporting role, in Southern California and West Virginia between 1987 and 1989. “A strong supporter of the position that women can and should be ordained, Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara, [was] the Maha Thera most instrumental in ordaining Theravada women here in the States” in the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the auspicious 1988 Samaneri Ordination, which was by far the best recorded, this was published not long after in *Dharma Voice*:

Thirty two Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis and hundreds of laypeople gathered on the full moon day of Vesak at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles to share in the historically important event of the ordination of a young Thai woman into the samaneri order. The temple had never been so crowded, nor the feeling so profound and joyful. On one side of the altar, dressed in saffron robes, twenty-five Theravada Bhikkhus, both Sri Lankan and Thai, sat, while on the other side sat eight Bhikkhunis, dressed in yellow and red, grey and brown robes of the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese traditions. In the middle, just before the altar, sat the three ordaining maha theras...

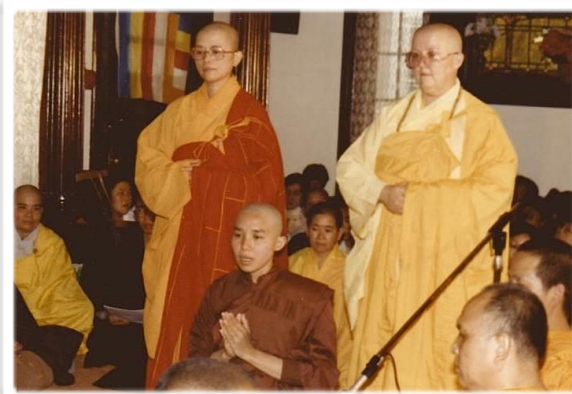
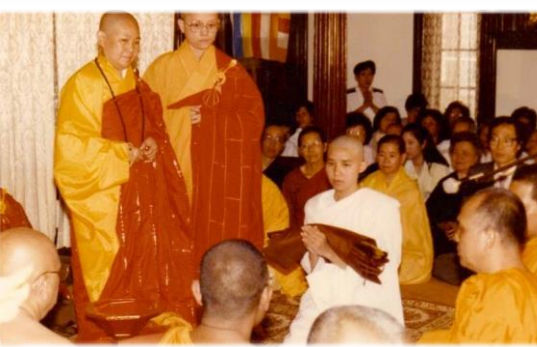
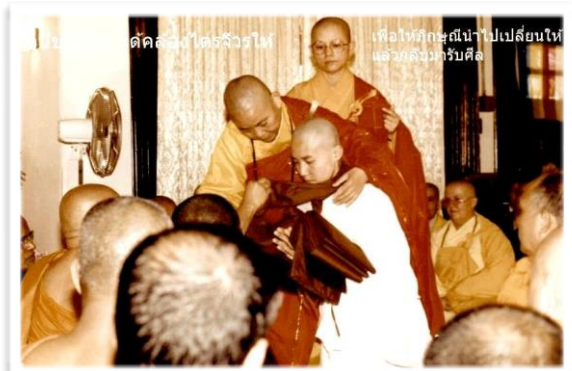
Chutima Vucharatavintara, dressed all in white presented herself to the Upajjhaya, presiding elder Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasara Maha Thero, and the Sangha members. The Upajjhaya, with the assistance of Chinese Bhikkhuni Ven. Hsin Kuang, Abbess of Hsi Lai Temple, cut a few strands of her hair. Upon the Upajjhaya’s request, three Mahayana Bhikkhuni Dharma Masters, one from each tradition, then led her from the room to a nearby Korean nuns’ temple and shave her head. As she returned with them, the very solemn nature of the ritual was firmly impressed upon the audience. The aspirant prostrated herself and requested Ven. Ratanasara to give her the ten vows of the ordained samaneri, stating, “*Okasa, aham bhante pabbjan yacami...*” The Acariya Ven. Walpola Piyananda, Abbot of Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara, directed her as the solemn

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<sup>4</sup> “[Regarding Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra:] He acted as acharya, one of the three ordaining masters, when the late Ven. Faitana Khampiro gave novice ordination in 1987 to two women: one Thai born and the other American...In May 1988 he was the ordaining master for the ordination of Rev. Dhammamitta at Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara. With the ordination this summer of two more Thai women and on American woman, the total number of Theravadan women now with full samaneri status numbers five....On August 12, Dr. Ratanasara also served as main preceptor at the ordination of two Thai women at Vipassana Dhura Society in Fawnskin, near Big Bear, California, upon the request of their teacher, Achan Sobin. Both women were already well accomplished in meditation and Dhamma, for they both had entered [monastic life] in their early teens and spent many years of practice and study at Soyong Temple in Bangkok. Their smooth skin and sparkling eyes make Candawanna, 36 years old, and Suwanna, age 48, look many years younger. But Samaneri Suwanna is already well known as an Abhidhamma teacher. The two women commute back and forth between Fawnskin to their patron Ajahn Sobin and Los Angeles for guidance from Dr. Ratanasara. In all these ordinations, many Theravādan monks gathered to give their support and blessing. In addition, Dr. Ratanasara invited Mahayana Bhikkhunis to be present and participate in the service [by shaving the candidates’ head and helping them to robe], for he felt the Bhikkhunis would offer strength and legitimacy to the ordinations. He has expressed the hope that in a few years all of the samaneris can be given full bhikkhuni ordination.” *Dharma Voice* (Jun-Sep 1989) 19

ceremony began. Chutima presented robes... the upajjhaya accepted them and asked Ven. Hsin Kuang to drape one of the pieces around her neck. Then the senior Bhikkhunis led her away and dressed her in the robes. When the Bhikkhunis brought the young novice back into the shrine room for receiving the ten vows, several of the women in the audience wept tears of joy. Chutima formally took the vows and asked Ven. Ratanasara to continue as her Preceptor. He agreed...and the Order of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis approved the name Dhammamitta for the new samaneri.

The preparations for the ordination had begun six months earlier when Chutima approached Ven. Piyananda to ask for initiation into the Order. Chutima was examined several times by both Ven. Piyananda and Ven. Ratanasara. They took her to meet several of the elder Bhikkhunis for their examination of her. All of the Sangha members who questioned the aspirant agreed that she looked to be a suitable candidate. They sent a letter to all members of the Sangha Council of Sri Lanka monks in North America. They also consulted with the two leading Thai temples in Southern California...<sup>5</sup>



At the close of the May Vesak Day 1988 Sāmaṇerī Ordination:<sup>6</sup>

Ven. Ratanasāra spoke to the audience about the ordination. He quoted from the Vinaya text, *"I allow, monks, nuns to be ordained by monks."* He also mentioned that in Buddhist history Sri Lankan nuns went to China in the fourth century and ordained Chinese women as bhikkhunis...the lineage of the Bhikkhuni Order in those countries (referring to China, Korea, Vietnam) has remained unbroken and has come to the United States.

<sup>5</sup> *Dharma Voice* (Apr-Jul 1988) 17. My gratitude to Prof. Paul Numrich for providing scans of relevant pages of *Dharma Voice* from his research archives, here and below.

<sup>6</sup> See [Chutima-Dhammamittā's 1988 Sāmaṇerī Ordination video](#)





Sāmaṇerī Dhammamittā pindapata (almsround)  
with local Southern California Thai, Lao and  
Cambodian community

He continued, "The state of women in Buddhism must be viewed afresh. We have received numerous requests from female devotees to consider their request for ordination. Having considered this request carefully, the monks of Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara could find no reason to deny ordination and decided to open the door for the restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in America."

He concluded, "Personally I am delighted to be the preceptor at this historic occasion. I took on this role with full understanding of the great responsibility and ramifications of this act. We hope that this ordination will help the Buddha-sasana to flourish in this country with greater maturity and vigour. I appeal to the Four-fold Community of Sangha and Laity to recognise Dhammamittā as a dually ordained

Samaneri and provide all support to assure her success for the glory of the Buddha Sāsana."

The smiles on all faces were enough to ensure overwhelming approval. Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra appointed a Sangha committee of seven (consisting of four senior Theravāda bhikkhus and three bhikkhunīs of Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese traditions) to supervise and guide Dhammamittā in her education, training and welfare.<sup>7</sup>

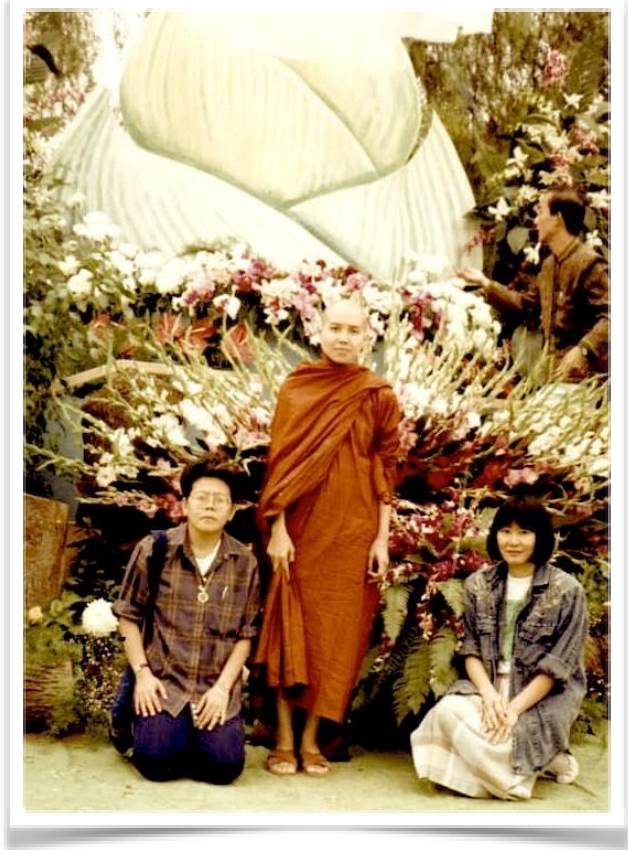
These Theravāda sāmaṇerī ordinations occurred both in the year before, the year of, and the year after the great 1988 International Ordination of 200 bhikkhunīs at Fo Guang Shan Buddha's Light International Association's newly-opened "Coming to the West" Hsi Lai Temple 佛光山 來西寺 in Hacienda Heights in Southern California. Not only did Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra play an important role as teacher, preceptor, supporter, mentor or guide in all these sāmaṇerī ordinations; but, as I was to learn first from Chutima-Dhammamittā, both our preceptor and Ven. Dr.



<sup>7</sup> *Dharma Voice* (Apr-Jul 1988) 18.

Piyananda actually played very important roles in the first Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai International Bhikkhunī Ordination in 1988 as well. What I learned about this was unexpected and in some ways different than what I'd previously read and heard; the differences significant enough to be worthy of proper research and record.

First, I will share with you something about the late Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and Ven. Dr. Piyananda, then about ordinations and their context, and finally about the women ordained and their own legacy, as well as that of those who taught them.



### **Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra Mahā Nāyaka Thero**



Ven. Bhikkhu Ratanasāra as a young monk in Sri Lanka

Bhante Ratanasāra was born in 1920 into the Dāsanāyaka clan of Havanpola, Sri Lanka, of which his father was a royal chieftain. He left the jewels and fine clothes for the simple unadorned robes of the Buddhist monk at a young age, of his own choice, and with his parents' blessing, entered the Buddhist Sangha as a *sāmaṇera* (male novice/sāmaṇa-in-training) at the age of eleven. He was fully accepted into the Buddhist Sangha as a bhikkhu in 1940 at the age of twenty, as is the story of so

many male monks in Theravāda Buddhism. After completing early education in Sri Lanka, where he showed an extraordinarily high-level aptitude and competence in leadership in Buddhism at the national level, Ven. Ratanasāra enrolled in Columbia University in New York, and in 1957 was



Ven. Ratanasāra Thera speaking at the United Nations



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra teaching in Sri Lanka

appointed the first-ever Buddhist delegate to the United Nations. This became a front-page news item in the New York Times, and soon he received many speaking invitations. Attending the UN sessions in the morning and Columbia University in the evening, he also received speaking invitations to nineteen countries, developing the theme closest to his heart: "Understanding and Cooperation."

He went on to receive his doctorate from the University of London in 1965, published *Buddhist Philosophy of Education*<sup>8</sup> in Sinhalese in 1969, and in the 70s became the Advisor to the Ministry of Education in his homeland of Sri Lanka. There he also became the Founding Director of the Institute of Post-Graduate Buddhist Studies at the University of Kelaniya, where he taught.

In 1979, he took sabbatical leave from the university to organize and attend the World Conference on Religion and Peace at Princeton University. Afterwards, still on sabbatical, and intending to give time to writing a book, he visited the Washington Buddhist Vihara in Washington DC, and while there was soon invited by two of his former bhikkhu students, Ven. Walpola Piyananda and Ven.



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra visiting and meeting with Sri Lankan bhikkhus in America



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra with Sri Lanka Buddhist community in Los Angeles

Pannila Ānanda, to visit the Los Angeles Buddhist Vihara. In 1980 on Ven. Piyananda's invitation, he permanently settled in the United States, initially at the newly-founded Dharma Vijāya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles.

With a vision to bring all nine of the Buddhist traditions present in Los Angeles and in the United States together in a unified body, first the Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California, of



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra with Fo Guang Shan founder Master Hsing Yun

<sup>8</sup> Published in English in 1995, available online here: <http://urbandharma.org/pdf5/bud-phil.pdf>.





Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and Master Hsing Yun at the first ever World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference outside of Asia, Hsi Lai Temple 1988

which he served as founding president, was born. With the Sangha Council, in the face of virulent local opposition, he successfully lobbied for the completion of the Hsi Lai Temple, founded by the propounder of Humanistic Buddhism, Venerable Master Hsing Yun 星雲大師 from Taiwan, which was soon to become the largest Buddhist temple and monastery complex in North America.

In 1986, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra also participated in the founding of the American Buddhist Congress, of which he served as the first executive president. When Pope John Paul II visited California in 1987, Bhante Ratanasāra was elected to give his welcome speech, which he did on the themes of "Friendship and Understanding." Then in 1989 he opened a national convention with dialog between himself and His Holiness (HH) the Dalai Lama. He also became active in the Inter-religious Council of Southern California, adopting what became his often-voiced motto of **"Harmony Among Buddhists & Amity Among Religions."**



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra with Pope John Paul II, California 1987

By 1990, the chief leading elder Buddhist monastics known as *Mahā Nāyaka Theras* and Supreme Sangha Council or *Kāraṇa Sangha Sabhā* of the Malwatta Chapter of the Siam Nikāya Order in Sri Lanka had bestowed on him the highest honor of chief prelate or patriarch for Sri Lanka Buddhists of both North and South American, that is, the entire Western Hemisphere. Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra, when asked to comment on this



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and HH the Dalai Lama meet with Christian leaders

title, mentioned he was "not much moved." He was observed to exemplify "respect for the 2600-year old Buddhist tradition he was a part of, with an open mind and heart to the contemporary needs of today's global village," and went on to found the Śrī Rāja Ratana International Mahā Vihāra near Columbo, in Sri Lanka.

We will return to his role in the revival of women's ordination in his native Theravāda Buddhist tradition. But first, we will meet one of the main co-participants in most of the US-based initiatives above.

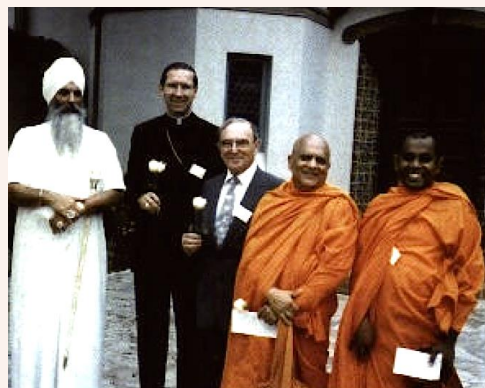
**Ven. Dr. Walpola Piyananda Nāyaka  
Mahā Thero, *Aggamahāpāṇḍita*<sup>9</sup>**

Ven. Piyananda was a student of Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra's in his monastic higher education as a young monk at Kelaniya University in Sri Lanka, and invited Bhante Ratanasāra to Los Angeles, seeing the benefit of the presence of such a strong, wise and capable elder.



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra (seated with ācariyas Ven. Pannila Ānanda and Ven. Piyananda) begins to serve as a preceptor ordaining male monastics in Southern California

He mentions from a young age having been "so sad the Bhikkhunī Order had disappeared" from his native Sri Lanka. Coming to the west, in the United States, he observed and had a chance to interact with numerous highly-capable



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and Ven. Piyananda meet with religious leaders for interreligious dialogue

women masters and leaders emerging in branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism, while similar figures were observed to be nearly entirely absent in Theravāda Buddhism in the West. Noting the strength and high level of training, education, competency and organization of the Taiwanese Bhikkhunī Sangha, as early as 1979, he began requesting Venerable Master Hsing Yun to bring Sri Lankan *dāsa-sīla-mātā* ten-precept nuns to train at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan.

<sup>9</sup> "Leading Scholar of Distinction," an award given at the highest level by the Burmese Buddhist monastic community.

Nearly 10 years later, with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra's boon, it became possible for him to support and sponsor a specially chosen group of eleven *dāsa-sīla* nuns to come to the United States for the first International Ordination at Fo Guang Shan's then newly-opened Hsi Lai branch temple in Southern California's



Eleven Sri Lanka ten-precept nun candidates with translator Mrs. Rajpakse at Hsi Lai Temple

Hacienda Heights. Although encountering strong cultural challenges leading to the return of six of them,<sup>10</sup> five of these eleven *dāsa-sīla* nuns were to complete the training and receive full ordination as bhikkhunīs.<sup>11</sup>

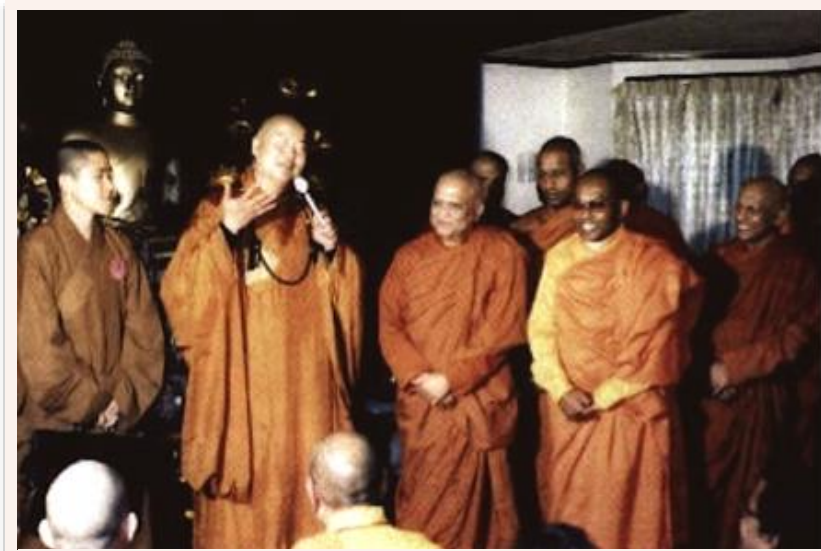
The first Sri Lankan bhikkhunī sangha of modern times was an integral part of the first International Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha revived at that time, comprised of twelve bhikkhunīs. And it was a part of an international group of bhikkhunī "ordination sisters" from various countries and traditions around the world. Supported by the leading Theravāda Buddhist prelate in the Western Hemisphere and one of the strongest Buddhist organizations in the world, this would seem a strong start. Of course, as with most things groundbreaking, it was not to be without challenges.

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<sup>10</sup> Difficulties for the Sri Lankan trainees cited by their fellow trainees include everything from difference systems of showers, toilets and food, including use (or non-use) of garlic; to cold weather; to impossible challenges with regards to the long hours of training and amount of bowing required for those who were elderly and not used to such rigors; as well as non-agreement with regards to different interpretations and practices related to Vinaya, including the Chinese use of black in the upper robes and sitting/bowing cloths (*nisidanam*). Six of the ten-precept nuns departed by the end of the first week of the month-long training, while five remained to complete the training.

<sup>11</sup> Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā from Thailand has reported with regards to the eleven Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs: "Some of them came forward to be reordained again when ordination was offered in Sri Lanka itself since 1998." From "Ordination: Sakyadhita's heritage from the Buddha," a paper presented at the International Conference on Buddhism in Asia: Challenges and Prospects, at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India, February 10-12, 20, 2006. Web: <http://thubtenchodron.org/2006/02/gotami-bhikkshuni-history/> (accessed 2 Jan 2017). Per Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Chueh Men Shi (Sakya Vimutti) the organizer of the 1998 Ordination in Bodhgaya, with a comparison of ordinees' names, there was no overlap between the five Sri Lanka bhikkhunīs ordained at Hsi Lai and those ordained in Bodhgaya. Perhaps Ven. Dhammanandā was referring to the six *dāsa-sīla* nuns who did not complete the ordination training at Hsi Lai in 1988 for whom we've not been able to ascertain names to date. Further research required.

## **The 1988 International Bhikkhunī Ordinations at Hsi Lai Temple, Hacienda Heights, Southern California**



Master Hsing Yun with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra, Ven. Piyananda and Sri Lanka bhikkhu sangha

Together with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra, a group of five senior Sri Lanka bhikkhu teachers in total, including Ven. Walpola Piyananda and the Ven. Pannila Ānanda of Dharma Vijaya, gave training and instruction to the five Sri Lanka nuns they had sponsored,<sup>12</sup> selected and brought

from Sri Lanka by Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra.<sup>13</sup> Bhante Ratanasāra gave public teachings in English during the ordination training period open not only to the Sri Lankan and international Theravāda candidates, but open to all 200 of the bhikkhunī ordination candidates. These teachings were in English and simultaneously translated into Chinese and also into Sinhala.<sup>14</sup> The candidates included twelve eight- and ten-precept nuns from various Theravāda traditions<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Author's personal interview with Ven. Dr. Walpola Piyananda, Nampet Panichpant-Michaelson and Chutima Vucharatachintara conducted at Dharma Vijaya in Los Angeles on 7 August 2016, video recorded by Lisa Kring.

<sup>13</sup> Bhikkhuni Bhadra, *Higher Ordination and Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka*, Dehiwala (2001) 25

<sup>14</sup> Author's personal interview with Dharma Master Mankuang Shi at Hsi Lai Temple (9 August 2016), video recorded by Nampet Panichpant-Michaelson

<sup>15</sup> Rohan L. Jayatilleke in "Bhikkuni Order in the 20th century" (*Daily News*, 4 May 2010) mentions Thai participation as well: "In Thailand the two Thai women who obtained full ordination on their return home, failed to follow the lifestyle of monasticism as expected by Thai standards and they led a quiet life without being recognised by the Buddhist society." Web: <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2010/05/04/fea21.asp> (accessed 1 Jan 2017). Ven Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā also mentions two Thai bhikkhunīs ordained in 1988, naming them as Varaporn and La-O, as cited in Tomomi Ito: (2012) "Questions of ordination legitimacy for newly ordained Theravāda bhikkhunī in Thailand" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 43 (57) f6, and in Ven. Dhammanandā's (2008) lecture on "Contemporary Development on Bhikkhuni Sangha" to the University of Sydney, Australia. I have not been able to identify them in any of the commemorative ordination photographs for the Theravāda group, nor to find a participant who remembers them. Tomomi Ito recalls at least one of the Thai ordinees in 1988 who she met to have been Chinese-Thai and to have ordained in the Mahāyāna (rather than Theravāda) tradition as Bhikṣuṇī Mansi Shi (personal correspondence via Messenger 19 Jan 2017). For this reason, I have not included them in the count of Theravāda bhikkhunīs ordained, despite the references above. If included, the number would be fourteen rather than twelve Theravāda traditions' bhikkhunīs ordained in 1988.



and eight *getsulmas* (Pali: *sāmaṇerīs*, Skt: *srāmaṇerikās*) from Tibetan monastic traditions, with the remainder of the ordination candidates being from Korean, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Thai Mahāyāna traditions.



Tibetan teachers, Ven. Geshe Konchok Tsering and Ven. Kalsang Damdul (center) with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Karma Lekshe Tsomo (front right) Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen (front left), Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron (mid right) and eight ordinees from Tibetan traditions. (Sri Lankan trainees upper left)

In addition to a full contingent of skilled bhikkhu and bhikkhunī training teachers from Taiwan, Korea and mainland China, together with the five elder Theravāda bhikkhu teachers, a senior Tibetan teacher, Ven. Geshe Konchok Tsering དགེ་བཤེས་དཀོན་མཆོག་ཚེ་རིང་ from Ganden Shartse Monastery in Mundgod, India, and his translator, Ven. Kalsang Damdul བརྩན་པ་སྐལ་བཟང་དབྱ་འདུལ་, now of the Tibetan Institute of Buddhist Dialectics མཚན་ཉིད་སློབ་གྲྭ་, joined in to observe and report on the training and ordination for the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen དགེ་སློང་ཨ་བླ་མས་པ་ཚེ་སློང་, then newly-appointed Head of the Sakyadhita Vinaya Research Committee and in charge of the Tibetan Center for Buddhist Studies (Tibetisches Zentrum)'s Vinaya Research Project,<sup>16</sup> was invited to join them for the entirety of the training. Ven. Jampa was then a very rare female monastic not only in being fully ordained as a bhikṣuṇī herself (in 1985), but also having by then completed eight of ten years of Vinaya

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://www.studienstiftung-fuer-buddhismus.de/english/index.php/Projects/VinayaResearch>

education in the Tibetan tradition with late Ven. Geshe Thubten Ngawang. She served as one of the Vinaya observers, consultants and discussants throughout the entire ordination training period; she in turn, consulting with Ven. Geshe

Konchok Tsering as questions and issues for discussion arose among the international masters as well as the trainees of various traditions.<sup>17</sup>



Geshe Gyaltsen offers Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra a copy of the Tibetan Vinaya text



Geshe Gyaltsen introducing and explaining the Tibetan Vinaya text to Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra



Geshe Gyelsten in Comparative Vinaya discussion with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra reviewing Tibetan Vinaya text comments on similarity to old Sri Lanka palm leaf manuscripts

The late Ven. Geshe Tsultim Gyeltsen དགེ་བཤེས་ཚུལ་ཁྱིམ་སྐུ་མཆོད་, the founding teacher of Gaden Shartse Thubten Dhargye Ling “Land of Flourishing Dharma” Center for the Study of Buddhism and Tibetan Culture, a *lharampa geshe* or geshe of the highest degree in Tibetan Buddhism, also gave public teachings during the ordination training, which were translated into both English and Chinese.<sup>18</sup>

Korean Vinaya Master Bo Seong Sunim 菩成 律師 from Song Kwang Sa 松廣寺, the “Sangha Jewel Monastery”—one of the primary Three Jewels monasteries of the leading Jogye Order of Korea Buddhism 大韓佛教 曹溪宗—also joined as an observer and discussant throughout the entirety of the training and gave public teachings to the candidates.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Per personal correspondence by email with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen between Dec 2016 and Jan 2017

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Per personal correspondence by email with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Chi Kwang Sunim between Dec 2016 and Jan 2017. According to Ven. Chi Kwang, Ven. Bo Seon Sunim’s main interest was in gathering information on procedures differing from those in use in Korea at that time with regards to the Triple Ordination, rituals and in educating monastics of other cultures. His intention was directed towards introducing what was lost, or beneficial to the Jogye Order, and towards furthering the education of the bhikkhus in the newly-established Vinaya Institute at Song Kwang Sa.

Further, Elder Master Mengcan 夢參老和尚, a great senior monk from mainland China, who practiced in prison for more than 30 years, offered public teachings (more will be said of him at the end). Thus there was instruction and guidance from great teachers of all three main Buddhist monastic traditions.

One 1988 Ordination training participant in the international group who was resident at Hsi Lai in 2016, Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Mankuang Shi 釋滿光, remembers there being both daily tradition-specific training offered to each training group such as Theravāda or Chinese Mahāyāna, as well the special program of Vinaya teachings from the various international great teachers offered for the entire cohort. This was especially so for the Sri Lanka Theravāda nuns' instruction and training offered by the Theravāda elder bhikkhus which was either given in Sinhalese or translated into Sinhalese.<sup>20</sup> There was also full English-language training or translation offered for the entire international group, and Chinese-language training and translation for all Chinese-speaking participants. This was a major, multi-faceted undertaking which Fo Guang Shan was to repeat and further perfect a decade later in the "Back to the Buddhist Homeland" 1998 International Ordination in Bodhgaya (Buddhagaya), India, and not long after again in the 2000 International Ordination at Fo Guang Shan's Buddha's Light Mountain in Taiwan.<sup>21</sup>

In these first 1988 "Coming to the West" international ordinations at Hsi Lai Temple, candidates were allowed to wear the original robes of their tradition, and also offered the opportunity to join in using the Chinese training and ordination robes, which were provided for them. The same was true for sitting/bowing cloths and other monastic requisites. Several, but not all, of the international candidates chose to wear the offered brown and gold Chinese robes and use other requisites for the training period; not for the sake of their

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<sup>20</sup> Per 6 April 2017 author's interview with Ven. Dr Walpola Piyananda, as noted above, Ven. Piyananda, Ven. Ānanda and Ven. Hsin Kuang all served as interpreters for the Sri Lankan candidates during the training and instruction (Ven. Hsin Kuang and Ven. Ānanda from Chinese ↔ Japanese ↔ Sinhala, as both Ven. Hsin Kuang and Ven. Ānanda spoke Japanese). Per Ven. Dhammanandā Bhikkhūnī, in her "Keeping Track of the revival of bhikkhuni ordination in Sri Lanka," a Mrs. Rajpakse (who can be seen in several of the photos at the side or back wearing sunglasses and blue and black clothes) accompanied the eleven ten-precept nuns from Sri Lanka and served as their translator for much of the ordination training. The Free Library, NIBWA Newsletter of International Buddhist Women (2006); Web: <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Keeping+track+of+the+revival+of+bhikkhuni+ordination+in+Sri+Lanka.-a0158093987> (accessed 12 Jan 2017). According to personal correspondence with bhikkhūnī Ven. Halpandeniye Supeshalā, in her interview with bhikkhūnī Ven. Viśhākā Dhammasīlā, it was a Mrs. Anula who was attached with Sakyadhita rather, who offered both translation and organisation (personal email correspondence 29 Jan 2017). We speculate her name to be Anula Rajpakse.

<sup>21</sup> Per 8 April 2017 author's interview with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Mankuang Shi, as noted above.



changing or converting to the Taiwanese Mahāyāna tradition, but simply to learn about the tradition which was supporting them so greatly through this temporary, first-hand, immersion experience offered to all the ordination candidates.<sup>22</sup> Also, in 1988, all but two of the Theravāda bhikkhunī ordination candidates did not come with complete sets of Theravāda-style bhikkhunī robes already prepared or locally organized, so most used the robes offered by Hsi Lai Temple.



International group of female monastic ordination trainees with Master Hsing Yun (center) and Sinhalese translator Mrs. Rajpakse (in turquoise blue, back right) at Hsi Lai 1988

It may be noted, this was one aspect of the training and ordination format which was to be changed according to sensibilities and feedback with regard to greater acceptability in the subsequent years' 1998 and 2000 ordinations in Bodhgaya and Taiwan respectively.<sup>23</sup> In these later Fo Guang Shan-organized ordinations, all candidates wore only the robes of their tradition of origin for the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Theravāda bhikkhunīs' wearing robes of another tradition at the time of ordination was one of the discomfitures raised with regards to the 1996 Bhikkhunī Ordination in Sarnath as well. Although the robe color and style does not affect the legitimacy of an ordination, the issue was one of a perception of likeness and with it, belonging. See Ranjani De Silva in the Buddhist Society of Victoria's "[Bhikkhuni Resurrection - The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in Sri Lanka](#)" (2013) 42:28-42:51. In 1996, Ven. Walpola Piyananda prepared ten sets of Theravāda robes beforehand to give to the ten newly-ordained bhikkhunīs directly after their ordination, per Ranjani De Silva at 47:00-47:49. Per Bhikkhunī Kusumā at 48:00-48:13, after robing in the Sri Lankan robes, Ven. Devasiri read the Ovāda exhortation on the parājikās, etc., thus the Sri Lankan Theravāda bhikkhus made the bhikkhunīs "acceptable to the Pāli tradition."





Sri Lanka bhikkhunī ordinees (back right and left) and instructor Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusuma (center left back) with Master Hsing Yun (center front) and bhikkhu ordination masters of Theravāda and East Asian Buddhist traditions (front right and left)

entirety of the training and the ordination itself, and robe sponsors were arranged for the Indian and Nepalese Theravāda bhikkhunī ordination candidates.

At the completion of the preliminary training period, for the ordinations themselves, the international female monastic candidates were all offered the option for either Double or Triple Platform Ordination, which included: 1) First (Lower/Foundational) Platform preliminary Sāmaṇerī/Srāmaṇerikā Novice Precepts and Ordination, followed by 2) Second (Higher) Platform Dual Bhikkhunī/Bhikṣuṇī Ordination, first with the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha and then confirmed and completed with the Bhikkhu Saṅgha.<sup>24</sup> For 3) Third Platform Bodhisattva Precepts, the international candidates in Theravāda and Tibetan traditions were welcome to participate, but not required to do so. Fo Guang Shan organizers and teachers were fully aware and respectful of the fact that the first two platforms' precepts and levels of ordination are common to and shared by all early Theriyā/Sthāvira traditions of which the Pāli-based South and Southeast Asian Mahāvihāravāsin Theravāda Vinaya traditions, the East Asian Dharmaguptaka Vinaya traditions, and the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivādan Vinaya

<sup>24</sup> It has been stated by various persons on several occasions that this ordination was not a dual ordination; however, according to all participants interviewed, and a review of the ordination certificates themselves, this was not the case for the 1988 Ordination at Hsi Lai, which was a fully proper dual ordination with both senior bhikkhu and bhikkhunī preceptor and principle ācariyās from the Fo Guang Shan tradition, with additional bhikkhu masters of various Dharmaguptaka traditions also participating as witnessing sangha. The dual ordinations at Hsi Lai in 1988 and at Bodhgaya in 1998 may have been confused with the non-dual ordination by a Korean bhikkhu sangha with a Sri Lankan bhikkhu sangha as witnesses in 1996 at Sarnath, and the non-dual ordination by the Sri Lankan bhikkhu sangha in 1998 at International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles.

traditions were and are all a part. However, with regard to the third platform bodhisattva precepts, these are unique to the East Asian Mahāyāna traditions. It is well known the Pāli-based Theravāda tradition does not include third platform bodhisattva precepts as a regular part of the training, while Tibetan traditions use a different set of bodhisattva precepts. Several, but not all of the international ordinees chose to undertake the third platform ordination and receive the bodhisattva precepts.<sup>25</sup>



Sri Lankan and multi-national bhikkhuni ordinees at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan in the year 2000

For the five Sri Lanka Theravāda *dāsa-sīla* bhikkhunī ordination candidates, Chutima, Ven. Piyananda and Ven. Mankuang Shi all independently reported the Sinhalese candidates undertook a preliminary Pāli-text rite ordination with the Sri Lanka bhikkhu sangha in which Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra acted as preceptor. This was then followed by the Dual Ordination via the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya rite of the Chinese Tripiṭaka.<sup>26</sup> It is this method which was recorded as used and approved of in China in the early 5th century CE, when Sri Lanka bhikkhunīs came to establish the tradition of dual ordination for bhikkhunīs in China at the guidance of Kashmiri Tripiṭaka and Vinaya Master Guṇavārman. Venerable Master Guṇavārman had studied, trained and taught extensively in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia before coming to teach in China, where he translated the Dharmaguptaka Four-part Bhikkhunī Vinaya into

<sup>25</sup> Per 8 April 2017 author's interview with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Mankuang Shi, as noted above.

<sup>26</sup> Per both August 6th and August 8th author's personal interviews with Bhante Piyananda and Ven. Mankuang Shi, as above.



Bhikkhunī Preceptor Ven. Hsin Kuang,  
1988 Ordination Hsi Lai

Chinese. The method was based on the model of the inspired memory of that early gift of the Dual Ordination from Sri Lanka to China and the idea of the returning of that gift from China (here Taiwan) to Sri Lanka,<sup>27</sup> about which more will be said later.

It may be noted here as well, that this is a slightly different procedure than was used later in the subsequent great international ordinations of 1998 in Bodhgaya and of 2000 in Taiwan,<sup>28</sup> where Theravāda bhikkhunī

candidates undertook the Dual Ordination via the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya rite first and then were ordained subsequently via the Pāli-text rite by the masters of the Sri Lankan and International Theravāda Bhikkhu Sangha for the sake of converting their ordination tradition and membership status to that of the Pāli-text Vinaya based Theravāda.<sup>29</sup> This latter method is that generally used in the past century and still today in Theravāda Buddhism in Asia for bhikkhus when a male monastic or priest of another Buddhist tradition wishes to formally join and gain full membership—*saṃvāsa*—in a Theravāda bhikkhu sangha.



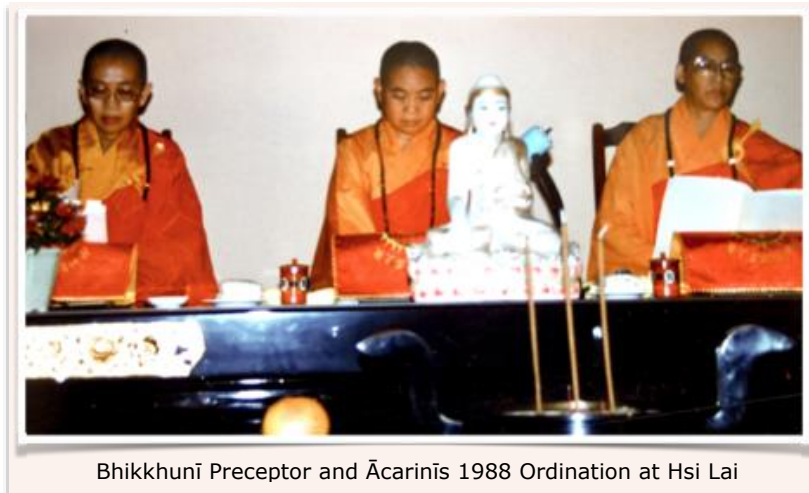
Bhikkhunī Ācarinī, 1988 Ordination  
Hsi Lai

<sup>27</sup> Per both August 6th and August 8th author's personal interviews with Bhante Piyananda and Ven. Mankuang Shi, as above.

<sup>28</sup> Although not a dual ordination in 1996, the 1996 Ordination in Sarnath may have been similar in one way to the 1988 Ordination. In 1996, as related by Ranjani De Silva in "Reclaiming the Robe: Reviving the Bhikkhunī Order in Sri Lanka": "In the morning of the day of ordination, five Theravāda monks from Sri Lanka administered the *sāmaṇerī* (novice) ordination to the nuns, and in the afternoon, ten Korean *bhikkhus* administered the higher ordination according to the Dharmagupta Vinaya." Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice*, SUNY (2004) 126-127. Per personal interview with Ven. Dr. Piyananda, who co-organized, participated in and served as the keynote speaker for the 1996 Ordination in Sarnath, twenty-one Sri Lankan bhikkhu teachers *joined in the upasamapadā* ordination *Sanghakamma* at Sarnath as witnessing masters, the Ovāda given directly after the ordination was offered by a Theravāda bhikkhu elder, and directly after the ordination and exhortation the Sri Lanka bhikkhunīs were given the Theravāda robes to enrobe in, and then blessed by the Theravāda bhikkhus wearing them (6 Aug 2016 personal interview, Clip92). These latter points all distinguish the 1996 ordination from that in 1988.

<sup>29</sup> See Bhikkhu Analayo, "The Legality of Bhikkhunī Ordination," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, Volume 20, 2013; Web: <https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/legality.pdf>





Bhikkhunī Preceptor and Ācarinīs 1988 Ordination at Hsi Lai

#### At Hsi Lai

Temple, as with all the later international dual ordinations organized and offered by Fo Guang Shan, the 1988 dual ordination was intentionally an international one, not only with international trainees and ordines,

as well as lecturers, but with an international ordaining sangha of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya tradition;<sup>30</sup> while the leading bhikkhu preceptor and disciplinarians, as well as the core bhikkhunī preceptor and two leading bhikkhunī ācariyās, were all Fo Guang Shan masters.

In 1988, the bhikkhunī preceptor was Hsi Lai Temple Abbess Dharma Master Ven. Hsin Kuang “Heart Light” 心光和尚<sup>31</sup> and the principle bhikkhunī teachers/ ācarinīs were Dharma Masters Ven. Tzu Jung “Holding Mettā” 慈容法師 and Ven. Tzu Hui “Loving Kindness” 慈惠法師.<sup>32</sup> The bhikkhu preceptor was the

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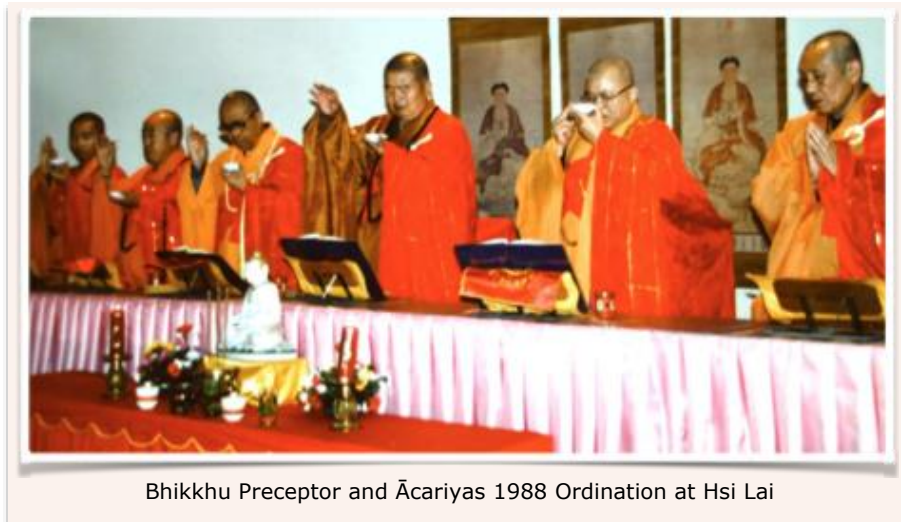
<sup>30</sup> In the 1998 and 2000 ordinations in Bodhgaya and Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan respectively, Theravāda bhikkhu masters participated as witnessing masters with the International Bhikkhu Sangha in the second part of the dual ordination, the confirmation and completion of the bhikkhunīs’ ordination with the Bhikkhu Sangha. However, per Ven. Mankuang Shi, in 1988, the international ordaining sangha were all of East Asian Dharmaguptaka Vinaya traditions. These included Vietnamese patriarch Ven. Thich Man-giac and Ven. Luang Chin Dharmaraksa. The Theravāda bhikkhus led by Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra did *not* participate in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya Sangha Act with the International Bhikkhu Sangha itself. Rather, *prior to the dual ordination*, they gave Pāli-text rite ordination to the Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs administered by the Theravāda bhikkhu sangha alone. This is to clarify the meaning here and as earlier published: “they were ordained by *Mahayana* nuns and both Theravāda and *Mahayana* monks,” by Elizabeth J. Harris in *Nivedini* “Reclaiming the Sacred,” (2000) 17; “several women were ordained in an upasampada (higher ordination) ceremony in Los Angeles before some Sri Lankan monks and bhikkhunīs from Taiwan” in “Buddhism in Sri Lanka” *Buddhism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives* edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz (2006) 62-63; and “they were ordained by nuns from Taiwan as well as by Mahāyāna- and Theravāda monks” in Petra Keiffer-Pülz “The Restoration of the bhikkhunīsaṅgha in the Theravāda tradition” (2007) 6.

<sup>31</sup> The first name “Hsin 心—Heart/Mind” is used for all elected and Dharma transmitted abbots and abbesses in the Fo Guang Shan tradition, as well as those monastics of the tradition who are very senior masters.

<sup>32</sup> Dharma Master Tzu Hui also served as an *Ācaryanī* (the form of the word *Ācarinī* used in 1998 and 2000 by Fo Guang Shan) for the 1998 Bhikkhunī Ordinations in Bodhgaya and as Karma *Ācaryanī* for the year 2000 Bhikkhunī Ordinations at Fo Guang Shan, Taiwan. She has also served as vice-president of the Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism since 2012. Dharma Master Tzu Jung served as abbess of Hsi Lai Temple from 1995-2000, and served as the Instructing *Ācaryanī* for the 2000 Bhikkhunī Ordinations at Fo Guang Shan, Taiwan, as well as serving as chief commander for the BLIA Sichuan Rescue Command Center relief efforts in



venerable  
founder of Fo  
Guang Shan,  
Master Hsing Yun  
“Nebula” 星雲大師  
himself. The  
principle bhikkhu  
teachers/*ācaryas*  
were Dharma  
Masters Ven. Au  
Ling “Drenching  
Rain” 浩霖法師,



Bhikkhu Preceptor and Ācariyas 1988 Ordination at Hsi Lai

founding abbot of Dharma Seal Temple 法印寺 in Los Angeles, and Ven. Yin Hai “Ocean Nimitta” 印海法師, founder of the American Buddhist Association 美國佛教聯合會 in New York.<sup>33</sup> Master Hsing Yun’s designated heir as abbot of Fo Guang Shan, the late Master Hsin Ping “Heart Resolve” 心定和尚, and current Fo Guang Shan abbot Master Hsin Ting “Heart Peace” 心平和尚 served as the primary and assistant bhikkhu Masters of Discipline for the ordination.<sup>34</sup>

Upon the completion of the ordinations, twelve new bhikkhunīs of Theravāda traditions from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma, Thailand, Germany and USA emerged fully ordained;<sup>35</sup> as did eight new bhikṣuṇīs (Tibetan: *gelongma*) of

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Taipei after the 2014 earthquake. Among the bhikkhunī Witnessing Ācaryanīs, Ven. Tzu Chia, Ven. Tzu Yi and Ven. I Yen (Yi Yen) also participated in both the 1988 and year 2000 ordinations.

<sup>33</sup> Per the ordination certificates of Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Chi Kwang Sunim and Ven. Gelongma Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Choedroen, both fully ordained at the 1988 Hsi Lai Ordination; reviewed by the author, with gratitude to both venerables for providing their certificates. Dharma Master Yin Hai from Taiwan (originally from China), an eminent master in the lineage of Master Yin Shun 印順導師, is the founding abbot of the first Taiwanese Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, Dharma Seal Temple 法印寺. He also served as one of the primary Bhikkhu Ācaryas for the year 2000 International Ordination at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. Dharma Master Au Ling is founder of the American Buddhist Association 美國佛教聯合會 in New York. As the vice president of the World Buddhist Sangha Society 世界僧伽會, Master Au Ling attends Buddhist conferences around the world strengthening friendship and cultural exchange between Buddhists.

<sup>34</sup> Fo Guang Shan abbot Master Hsin Ting also served as an Ācarya for both the 1998 ordinations in Bodhgaya and year 2000 ordinations at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan as well.

<sup>35</sup> Per 1988 Hsi Lai Ordination Theravāda group commemorative ordination photos provided by Ven. Dhammā Mahātherī on 8 Jan 2016, and Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen on 7 Jan 2017; reviewed by author. Thai Theravāda participants have not been able to be found in the photos. If included, the number would be fourteen rather than twelve. Burmese bhikkhunī participation has not been noted in most sources. However, Ven. Walpola Piyananda and Chutima Vucharatavintara remember and report one of the ordinees being from Burma, and coming via Nepal together with the Nepalese nuns led by Guruma Dhammawati. This was Ven. Bhikkhunī

Tibetan traditions from Nepal, Bhutan, France, Spain, Czech Republic, Australia, and the states of California, Colorado and Hawaii in the USA.<sup>36</sup> They were joined by new Mahāyāna bhikkhunī Sangha sisters of Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese-American, Chinese-Canadian, Chinese-Thai, Chinese-Indonesian and Taiwanese Buddhist traditions, with a total of 200 women ordained as bhikkhunīs.<sup>37</sup> The ordination was grand, awe-inspiring and unprecedented both in the United States and in the Buddhist world.



(left to right) Bhikkhunī and Bhikkhu Preceptors and Ordination Masters with 200 new bhikkhunīs and bhikṣuṇīs, international ordinees in upper mid-center, Dec 26, 1988 Hsi Lai

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Gunavāṭī (author's 6 Aug 2016 personal interview with Ven. Piyananda and Chutima Clip94). She would thus be the first Burmese bhikkhunī of the twentieth century.

<sup>36</sup> Per 1988 Hsi Lai Ordination Tibetan-traditions group commemorative ordinations photos provided by Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen together with personal correspondence via email 4-8 Jan 2017, and also supplemented by the ordination-period notes of Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Choedroen (personal correspondence via email 10 Jan 2017).

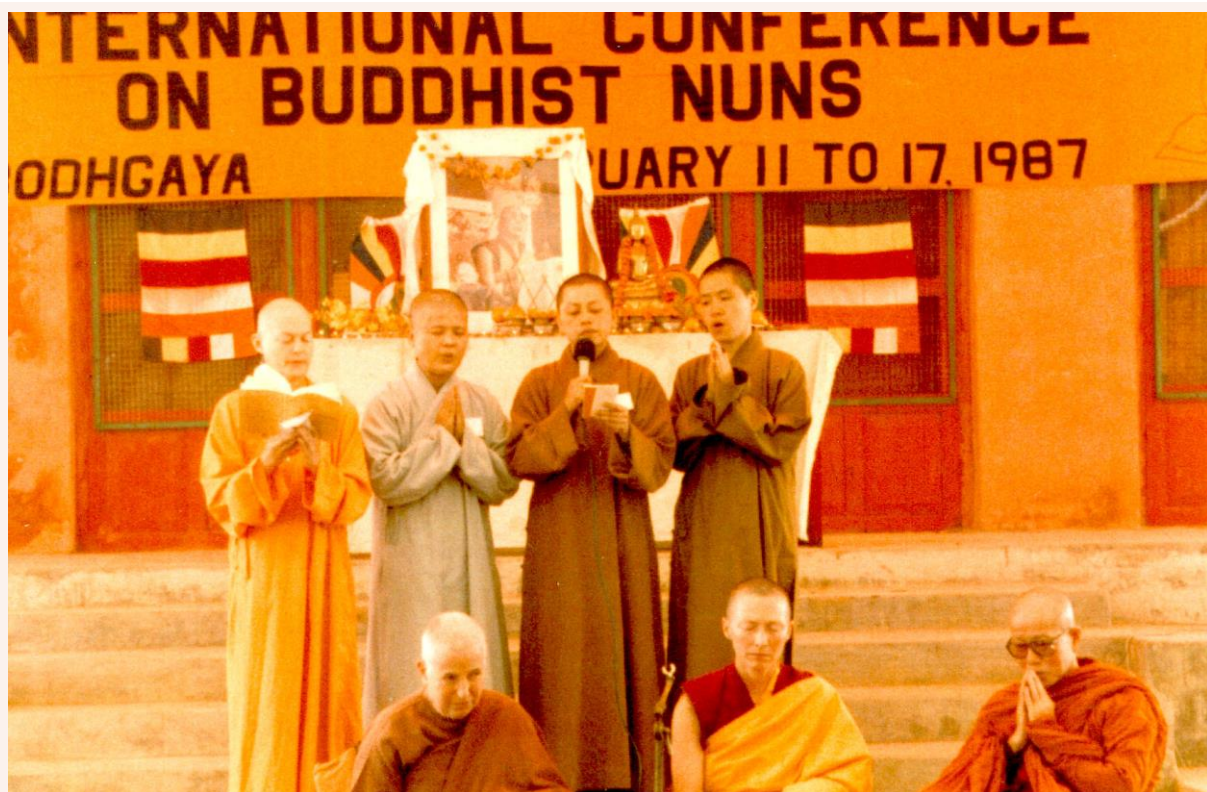
<sup>37</sup> Cheris Kramarae, Dale Spender, *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women: Global Women's Issues and Knowledge*, Routledge, (2004) 125. Also supplemented by the ordination-period notes of Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Choedroen (personal correspondence via email 10 Jan 2017), and personal correspondence with Ven. Mankuang Shi (10 Jan 2017).



## Events Leading Up to and Following the 1988 International Bhikkhunī Ordinations

Although unprecedented, the 1988 Bhikkhunī Ordination at Fo Guang Shan's Hsi Lai Temple did not happen in a vacuum. The Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women was formed and emerged from what became its first International Conference of Buddhist Nuns in India in 1987,<sup>38</sup> with one of its primary purposes being to support the revival of full bhikkhunī/bhikṣuṇī ordination for women in Buddhism in traditions where it had been lost.

The year before, 1986, had seen the founding of the American Buddhist Congress, which then sponsored the "World Buddhism in North America" Conference in the summer of 1987.<sup>39</sup> During the conference, a decision was



International Conference on Buddhist Nuns 1987 Bodhgaya. In front row (left to right) Ayyā Khemā, Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Karma Lekshe Tsomo, Cambodian patriarch Phra Mahā Ghosananda

<sup>38</sup> See "Conferences" at [sakyadhita.org](http://sakyadhita.org): <http://sakyadhita.org/conferences/1st-si-con.html>

<sup>39</sup> Harvard Pluralism Project, "Ecumenical and Interfaith Buddhism: Coming Together in America"; Web: <http://pluralism.org/religions/buddhism/issues-for-buddhists-in-america/ecumenical-and-interfaith-buddhism-coming-together-in-america/> (accessed 1 Jan 2017). See also: LA Times, "A Remarkable Step : 45 American Buddhist Groups Convene, Form National Unit" Nov 14, 1987; Web: [http://articles.latimes.com/1987-11-14/local/me-5239\\_1\\_american-buddhist](http://articles.latimes.com/1987-11-14/local/me-5239_1_american-buddhist) (accessed 9 Jan 2017). The 1987 World Buddhism in North America Conference video is planned to be made available on the [Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom's YouTube channel](#) to coincide with the publication of this article.

taken among senior bhikkhu teachers and leaders of multiple traditions in support of the revival of the tradition of full ordination for women in Theravāda Buddhism, with this being seen as especially important and for the growth and establishment of Buddhism in the United States and in the West.<sup>40</sup>

Not long before, in 1983, the venerable Ajahn Sumedho, a leading western bhikkhu disciple of the renowned Thai forest tradition master Ajahn Chah, had, with the blessings of the Thai Sangha Council, gone ahead with giving the *Pabbajjā* to four western women in England at Amaravati Monastery, founding the *Sīladhārā* (“Holders of Virtue”) Order for women<sup>41</sup>—with the reasons for this allowance specifically given at that time being that, although not easy in Thailand, it may be possible and suitable to do in the west.<sup>42</sup>

The *Sīladhārā* Order itself was not without precedent in Asia. The movement to restore the *pabbajjā* and *upasampadā* for women in Buddhism began with the beginning of the 20th century, and there have been significant



Ordination of the first four *sīladhārās* in England in 1983

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<sup>40</sup> Paul David Numrich, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravāda Buddhist Temples*, Univ. of Tennessee Press, (1999) 60

<sup>41</sup> Ajahn Thānasantī “About this Issue” and Ajahn Sucitto “The Creation of the Order of Siladhara,” *Forest Sangha Newsletter*, October 2007/2550, Number 81; Web: <http://www.fsnewsletter.amaravati.org/html/81/aboutnun.htm> and <http://fsnewsletter.amaravati.org/html/81/order.htm> (accessed 6 Jan 2017)

<sup>42</sup> Per author’s personal conversation with Loung Por Sumedho, Spirit Rock Meditation Center Teacher’s Retreat 2004.



known efforts now for a full hundred years. A few of them will be mentioned in brief review here.

Anagarika Dharmapala, the distinguished Buddhist revivalist active in Sri Lanka and India, advocated restoration of the Bhikkhunī Order as early as 1891.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1900s, there was a movement involving several women undertaking sāmaṇerī and bhikkhunī ordination in the Thai capital,<sup>44</sup> and in the Thai-Lao countryside of the 1920s Hermann Norden of the Royal Geographic Society of Great Britain noted a “sisterhood of the yellow robe” in his travel diary.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1930s, in Sri Lanka, Gunapala Malalasekera, the President and founder of the World Federation of Buddhists, advocated for the restoration of the Bhikkhunī Order by Sinhalese bhikkhus based upon the Pali-text Vinaya’s allowance for ordination of bhikkhunīs by the Bhikkhu Sangha alone.<sup>46</sup> In Burma, the 1930s saw a proposal for reinstitution of the Bhikkhunī Order through ordination by the Bhikkhu Sangha submitted by the senior Buddhist monk, Ven. U Ādiccavamśa (Burmese: U Ardisavintha) in his *Bhikkhunī Sāsana Upadesā*, (Burmese: *Beikkhuni Thathano Padeiktha*, “Overview of the Bhikkhunī Sāsana”).

By the 1940s, one of the greatest masters of the 20th century, the teacher of the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw out of whom most of the contemporary international Vipassana meditation traditions have emerged—the Most Venerable Mingun Jetavan Sayadawgyi—offered his reasoned proposal in his *Milindapañha Tika* for the reestablishment of the Bhikkhunī Sāsana.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hema Goonatilake, “Women Regaining a Lost Legacy: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka” in *Out of the Shadows: Socially Engaged Buddhist Women in the Global Community*, Sri Satguru Publications (2006) 42

<sup>44</sup> The sāmaṇerī and bhikkhunī ordinations of Sara and Jongdi, the daughters of Narin Phasit. See: Tathaloka Bhikkhuni, “[Glimmers of a Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha History v2.2](#)”, *Gautami Samayiki*, 5th Year, 5th Issue, (Srabon 1422, July 2015) 20. See also: Peter Koret, *The Man Who Accused the King of Killing a Fish: The Biography of Narin Phasit of Siam, 1874-1950*, (2012), especially Ch V “The First Order of Female Monks in the History of Thailand,” pp 99-220.

<sup>45</sup> Kamala Tiyanich, *The Buddha in the Jungle* Ch 38. “Sisterhood of the Yellow Robe,” Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai (2003)

<sup>46</sup> Hema Goonatilake: “A Silent Revolution: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka,” a paper presented to the IAHR Regional Conference on the Study of Religions in India, New Delhi, India (Dec 2003) 2

<sup>47</sup> Tathaloka Bhikkhuni, “[Glimmers of a Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha History v2.2](#)”, *Gautami Samayiki*, 5th Year, 5th Issue, (Srabon 1422, July 2015) f31.

In the early 1950s, “the Venerable Pundit Narawila Dhammaratana Maha Thera, who led the Sri Lankan delegation to an international Buddhist Conference in China wrote, ‘The absence of the Bhikkhuni Order is a great loss to Sri Lanka. The Bhikkhuni order was established in China by Bhikkhunis from Sri Lanka. The Bhikkhuni Order there exists in its purity and unbroken line of succession. Therefore, it is most fitting that we restore the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka with the assistance of Chinese bhikkhunis.’ (Dhammaratana, 1952)”<sup>48</sup>

In Thailand in the 1950s, Voramai Kabilsingh, the mother of the woman now famed as “the first bhikkhunī in Thailand,” Ven. Dhammanandā Therī, received the “going forth” in Thailand from the Most Venerable Phra Prommuni of Wat Bawanniwet, the King’s own ordination master. She later traveled to Taiwan for full ordination as a bhikkhunī in the 70s, after learning of the continuation of the bhikkhunī lineage there.<sup>49</sup>

Also in the 1970s, in Thailand’s rural forest traditions, Phra Ajahn Wan Uttamo, an eminent disciple of the highly-revered Thai forest master Loung Por Mun (Ajahn Chah’s teacher), was observed by western monastic visitors to have ordained female disciples into the saffron-brown patchwork robes. In fact, he was one of several masters of the Thai forest traditions, including Ajahn Chah’s own nephew Ajahn Gunha, who had already been giving either *sāmaṇerī pabbajjā* or ten-precept ordination, if not *upasampadā*, to brown-robed nuns in the rural areas of Thailand.<sup>50</sup>

According to an *upāsikā* scholar who has played a very important role in the 1988 Ordination coming to be, Prof. Dr. Hema Goonatilake, “[a] new awakening occurred [in Sri Lanka] in 1983 when the [newly-established] Department of Buddhist Affairs in the Ministry of Cultural Affairs initiated a program of action for the promotion of *dāsa-sīla-mātās* (ten-precept nuns). A program was launched to provide educational facilities at district level monastic institutions to *dāsa-sīla-mātās* to prepare for Pracheena examinations (on

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<sup>48</sup> Hema Goonatilake, in “A Silent Revolution: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka,” a paper presented to the IAHR Regional Conference on the Study of Religions in India, New Delhi, India (Dec 2003) 3

<sup>49</sup> Tathaloka Bhikkhuni, “Glimmers of a Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha History v2.2”, *Gautami Samayiki*, 5th Year, 5th Issue, (Srabon 1422, July 2015) 20. For more on the international bhikṣuṇī ordinations in the 70s, see Rohan L. Jayetilleke’s “Bhikkhuni Order in the 20th Century”, Daily News (4 May 2010); Web: <http://archives.dailynews.lk/2010/05/04/fea21.asp>

<sup>50</sup> Tathaloka Bhikkhuni, “Glimmers of a Thai Bhikkhuni Sangha History v2.2”, *Gautami Samayiki*, 5th Year, 5th Issue, (Srabon 1422, July 2015) 20-21. Ajahn Gunha discontinued the practice when asked to do so by ecclesiastical authorities.

Buddhist studies and oriental languages), a facility that was available only to Sāmaṇeras and Bhikkhus up to that time.”<sup>51</sup>

It was in this Asian and International Theravāda context of the 1980’s that the aforementioned Sīladhārā Order of *pabbajitā* nuns was founded by the venerable bhikkhu preceptor and renowned teacher Ajahn Sumedho at Amaravati in England in 1983,<sup>52</sup> as an upgrading of the ten-precept nuns’ status. On the 9th of September 1984 in Sri Lanka, Ayyā Khemā, also working to improve opportunities for Theravāda women renunciates, inaugurated the Parappuduwa Nuns’ Island with the blessings of the late most venerable Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya Mahā Thero, and then much younger Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi. Ven. Ānanda Maitreya was one of the most highly revered monks in Sri Lankan Buddhism. He served as preceptor in the ten-precept nuns’ ordination of Sister Saṅghamittā from Switzerland and Sister Dhammadinnā, a graduate of Peradeniya University, on the inauguration day. This was soon followed by the ordination of further ten-precept nuns on Parappuduwa Island, including Sisters Vāyāmā from Australia and Uppalavāṇṇā (Uṭpalavārṇā) of Galle.<sup>53</sup> It was also at



The late Ayya Khema and ten-precept nuns at Parappuduwa Nuns Island, Sri Lanka circa 1984-1987

<sup>51</sup> Hema Goonatilake, in “A Silent Revolution: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka,” a paper presented to the IAHR Regional Conference on the Study of Religions in India, New Delhi, India (Dec 2003) 3

<sup>52</sup> Loung Por Sumedho, “The Richest Surprise,” *Forest Sangha Newsletter*, Oct 2007/2550, No. 81. Web: <http://www.fsnewsletter.amaravati.org/html/81/richest.htm> (accessed 3 Jan 2017)

<sup>53</sup> Per the photos and text published at [Parappuduwa web site about Parappuduwa island](#), together with personal email consultation with Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi (who was present for the inauguration and ordinations on 9 Sept

this time, in 1984, that Ayyā Khemā met Mdm. Ranjani de Silva, who was to become a founder and later president of Sakyadhita International, the founder of Sakyadhita Sri Lanka, and great supporter of the bhikkhunī revival in Sri Lanka.<sup>54</sup>

We now return to Dr. Hema Goonatilake, from whom I will quote extensively.<sup>55</sup> From September to November of 1984 she “made a study/lecture tour in South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and China with a view to getting a first-hand experience of the contemporary *Bhikkhuni* movement in the Mahayana countries. Before [she] left on this tour, [she] had completed a comparative study of the Bhikkhuni Vinaya of the Theravāda and the *Dharmagupta Vinaya*, which is presently observed by Chinese and Korean Bhikkhunis.”<sup>56</sup>

Dr. Goonatilake writes:

I made a participant observation study in South Korea, Taiwan and China while staying in nunneries and participating in their religious activities. I found that the role of *Bhikkhunis* both in South Korea and Taiwan where *Bhikkhunis* outnumber Bhikkhus was impressive. In Taiwan, the activities of *Bhikkhunis* seemed more organized and well patronized. I was convinced that Sri Lankan *dasa-sil-matas* should receive higher ordination from the Chinese tradition, the main reason being that the Sri Lankan women have a legitimate right to get back the higher ordination, which was conferred by them on the Chinese Bhikkhunis in 433 C. E. (Goonatilake 1994). In Taiwan at the Fo Guan Shan nunnery in Taipei where I had good interpretation services, I gave two public lectures during the two-week period I stayed. In one lecture, I outlined the history of events that led the Chinese Bhikkhunis to receive higher ordination from Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis, and the need for the Sri Lankan Bhikkhunis to get it back from the Chinese. It was obvious that the Bhikkhunis who fled Mainland China for Taiwan owing to the Cultural Revolution practised the precepts and continued the lineage without any break. The only snag with Taiwan was that Sri Lanka had no diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and it was unlikely that the Sri Lankan government would consider the idea of receiving higher ordination from Taiwan. I took the opportunity, however, to write an appeal to the Fo Guan Shan Headquarters to organize a ceremony to confer higher ordination on Sri Lankan *dasa-sil-matas*...

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1984 and Ven. Ayyā Vāyāmā Bhikkhunī (both per personal email correspondence with the author 13-14 Jan 2017)

<sup>54</sup> Per The Buddhist Society of Victoria’s “[Bhikkhuni Resurrection - The Revival of Bhikkhuni Ordination in Sri Lanka](#)” video interview of Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusumā and Mdm. Ranjani De Silva (Jul 2013) 53:00; Web: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d\\_yeu6RrJ2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_yeu6RrJ2g) (accessed Jan 2017). See also: Sakyadhita Executive Committee & Founders: <http://sakyadhita.org/home/exec.html>.

<sup>55</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Hema Goonatilake for her consultation and for pointing me to one of the most relevant of her many works, “A Silent Revolution,” cited repeatedly here.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid pp 3-4



She writes further:

After my return to Sri Lanka (December 1984), I wrote to the local newspapers about the unbroken lineage of the Chinese *Bhikkhunis* and their strict observance of *Bhikkhuni* precepts, both in China and Taiwan, and advocated the re-establishment of higher ordination in Sri Lanka with assistance from the Chinese tradition. I also translated the book *Bi-chu-ni-chang* (*Biographies of Bhikkhunis*) written in China in 520 A.D. This book, which deals with biographies of outstanding *Chinese Bhikkhunis* in the past, describes also how two teams of *Sinhala Bhikkhunis* headed by Devasara (*Tie-so-ra*) traveled to present-day Nanjing in 428 and 433 C. E., and conferred higher ordination at the Nanjing monastery to more than 300 Chinese nuns who had by then, received ordination only from *Bhikkhus*. This book was widely read by the *dasa-sil-matas*, and it has been reported that the strict discipline observed by the ancient Chinese *Bhikkhunis* as given in the book dispelled certain misconceptions, the *dasa-sil-matas*, their devotees and *Bhikkhus* had about the discipline of Mahayana *Bhikkhunis*.

In 1985, a delegation of Buddhist scholars to China was led by the Minister of Cultural Affairs to explore the possibility of restoring the *Bhikkhuni* order in Sri Lanka. The report of the delegation was never released, although one member of the delegation mentioned in an article that an unbroken *Bhikkhuni* lineage continued to exist in China (Wickramagama 1985)...

Subsequent to the visit of the Minister of Cultural Affairs to China, I was requested by the Department of Buddhist Affairs of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to draft a memorandum stating all arguments from my experience and knowledge in support of the restoration of the *Bhikkhuni* order with the assistance from China...

Although the effort made by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to restore the *Bhikkhuni* order, yielded no result, the interest generated during the period 1984-1985 continued to gather considerable momentum. The debate and discussion in the mass media did not die down as before to surface after another couple of years. The issue now turned into a continuing public discourse. Newspapers, both in Sinhala and English languages gave coverage to the arguments for and against the restoration of the *Bhikkhuni* order...

Another sign of hope was that a critical mass of scholars - both lay and *Bhikkhus* - from universities and monastic institutions advocating restoration, has been building alliances with *dasa-sil-matas*. Articles by these scholars began to appear regularly in daily and weekend newspapers and magazines...

The publication of articles advocating the revival of the *Bhikkhuni* order in mainstream Buddhist magazines, both in Sinhala and English had also become a regular feature by that time. To cite an example, the annual Buddhist publication of the Sri Lanka Government Printing Department called *Nivan Maga* (Way to *Nirvana*) devoted its 1994 publication to women's liberation, adorned with a picture of a serene *dasa-sil-mata* entering a shrine room with a bowl of flowers. This issue had a galaxy of *Bhikkhus*, *das-sil-matas*, laymen and women contributors advocating from different perspectives the revival of the *Bhikkhuni* order.<sup>57</sup>

Dr. Goonatilake's study tour results began to be published in her "Nuns of China: Part I – The Mainland" in *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*, the first

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid pp 4-5

of the now long series of Sakyadhita publications edited by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, published by Snow Lion Publications in New York in 1988.

It was in this very context also that Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and his colleagues of the American Sangha Congress and Buddhist Sangha Council of Southern California, including the very venerable late Phra Ajahn Khampiro (Gambhīro) of Wat Buddhagodom (Buddha Gotama), Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra himself, and Ven. Henepola Gunaratana (Bhante G), decided to go ahead with the first sāmaṇerī ordinations in the United States on both coasts between 1987 and 1989,<sup>58</sup> both in California and at the Bhavana Society in West Virginia.<sup>59</sup>

To recap, In 1987, thirty years ago, the late eminent Lao bhikkhu teacher Phra Ajahn Khampiro offered the Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā to two women, one American and one Thai, with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra serving as their Ācariya.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Dharma Voice* (Jun - Sep 1989) 19

<sup>59</sup> “The ordination of Sister Sama, as the new novice will now be called, was one of the few events of its kind not only in this country, but in the wider world of Theravada Buddhism. Although the Buddha welcomed women to come forward to join the homeless life as Bhikkhunis... Since the turn of the century, women in traditional Theravada Buddhist countries have been struggling with this problem, working towards restoring the bhikkhunis’ sangha. Working from traditional sources of Sangha law and basing their decisions on compassion, senior Theravada monks in America have decided to take the initial steps necessary to revive the Bhikkhuni sangha. Sister Sama’s novice ordination is the first step in the long process. The chapter of Theravada monks who participated in this ordination represented several Asian traditions and native-born north American monks. By their participation in this ordination, they have demonstrated their commitment to providing equality of opportunity and access to the teachings of the Buddha to all people regardless of culture, nationality, race—or gender.” *Bhavana Society Newsletter* (post ordination 1989) p 8-10, courtesy of the Bhavana Society library. See also the speeches by Bhante Gunaratana and Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra at the conclusion of the ordination on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKaSzF\\_3KUK](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKaSzF_3KUK).

<sup>60</sup> There appears to have been at least one further Sāmaṇerī Ordination in Los Angeles in 1987. Hema Goonatilake, in “A Silent Revolution: The Restoration of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka” (1993) p 7 also notes: “Ven. Walpola Piyaṛatana Thera of the Los Angeles Buddhist Vihāra was one of the first Bhikkhus to conduct samaneri ordination as early as 1987.” See also: Ven. Pubbaliye Maithree Moorthree’s 2548 BE MA thesis: “A Critical Study of the Re-Establishment of Bhikkhunī Sangha in Sri Lanka” where on page 22 he gives a different locative name of Ven. Piyaṛatana: “Ven. Dodanduwe Piyaṛatana Thera of the Los Angeles Buddhist Vihāra was one of the first Bhikkhus to conduct Samaneri Ordination as early as 1987.” The late most venerable Dodanduwe Piyaṛatana Tissa Mahānāyake Thero, considered a national hero in Sri Lanka, was a highly beloved and revered elder and one of the bhikkhus to travel to Burma by boat to restore the lineage of higher ordination for bhikkhus in Sri Lanka, but had already passed away at this time. However, another late Venerable Piyaṛatana, was at the time the head monk of Polgasduwa Hermitage at that time, the Ven. Anuragoda Piyaṛatana who served as preceptor in the *dāsa-sīla* ordination of Sister Vāyāmā at Parappuduwa Nuns Island in 1985. The emphasis in this ordination was on the ten precepts and there was no mention of the *pabbajjā* or *nissāya* of sāmaṇerī ordination (per personal email correspondence with Ayyā Vāyāmā 13 Jan 2017). There is currently no relationship known to the author between these sāmaṇerī ordinations by the Ven. Piyaṛatana in Los Angeles, California and the *dāsa-sīla* ordination of Ven. Ajahn Vāyāmā Bhikkhunī with Ven. Anuragoda Piyaṛatana as preceptor at Parappuduwa Nuns Island in 1985, although Polgasduwa Island is in Dodanduwe. In followup with Ven. Maithree, he states: “I dared to put name of venerable Dodanduwe Piyaṛathana as [he was] one of [the] monks who tried to ordain women as Dasa Sil Matas. I also agree that latter monk [Ven. Anuragoda Piyaṛatana] should be the one who ordained nuns in 1987.” (Personal correspondence with author via email, 22 Jan 2017)

Then in 1988, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra himself became a preceptor for the first time, with the highly-publicized, extremely well-attended and well-supported May Vesāka Day Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā of the Thai lawyer Chutima Vucharatavintara at the Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles.<sup>61</sup> In 1989, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra served as preceptor for women Vipassana meditation and Abhidhamma teachers who were themselves students of the most venerable Ajahn Sobin Namto.<sup>62</sup> Ajahn Sobin was one of the first meditation teachers at Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts and established a Vipassana meditation community in Big Bear in the west.<sup>63</sup> In 1989, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra travelled to the Bhavana Society outside of Washington DC in West Virginia together with Ven. Piyananda, to offer his support to the *sīmā* establishment and the very first ordinations there, which included both the *Upasampadā* Higher Ordination with Bhante Gunaratana as preceptor of three bhikkhus from the USA, Canada and Japan, as well as the historical Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā of the American, Misha Cowan, as Sāmaṇerī Sāmā.

During this period, the women who received Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā included:<sup>64</sup> Sāmaṇerī Sunandā (active in the 1987 Conference on World Buddhism in North America),<sup>65</sup> Sāmaṇerī Suyānee (Vipassana meditation teacher), Sāmaṇerī Dhammamittā (founder of Peace and Lovingkindness Meditation Center),<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Dharma Voice* (Apr - Jul 1988) 17. See also: “Buddhism Reaches Out in America,” *Los Angeles Times* (30 May 1988), LA Times Archives (accessed 28 Dec 2016)

<sup>62</sup> *Dharma Voice* (Jun - Sep 1989) 19

<sup>63</sup> Ajahn Sobin is also known as Achan Sobin Namto and Bhikkhu Sopako Bodhi. He is the founder of the Vipassana Dhura Meditation Society: <http://vipassanadhura.com/ourteacher.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> There should be at least one more ordained by Ven. Piyaratana in 1987 in Los Angeles as previously noted, but I’ve not been able to learn her/their name/s or any information about her/them.

<sup>65</sup> See Paul David Numrich’s “Vinaya in Theravaada Temples in the United States,” Chicago (1994) on Quang Duc’s “Buddhist Ethics” page. See also *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, Oxford (2003) 62-64. The 1987 World Buddhism in North America Conference video is scheduled to be made available via the Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom’s YouTube channel concurrent with the publication of this article.

<sup>66</sup> Per Ven. Walpola Piyananda, “for a personal visit to Thailand, Dhammamitta turned over her robes to him, with the understanding that she could receive reordination as a *sāmaṇerī* upon her return to the United States. According to Ven. Piyananda, Dhammamitta had wanted to wear the robes during her visit, on principle and in the face of probable disapprobation in Thailand. But he convinced her not to do so, considering that her trip to Thailand was personal in nature and thus not an appropriate occasion to make a political statement about the ordination of women into the Theravāda monastic order. Upon returning to the United States, Dhammamitta did not reordain,” Paul David Numrich: *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravāda Buddhist Temples*, University of Tennessee Press (1999) 60-61

Sāmaṇerī Suwānnā (Abhidhamma teacher), Sāmaṇerī Chandawānnā, and Sāmaṇerī Sāmā (at the Bhavana Society<sup>67</sup>).

Two of these first six sāmaṇerīs were of Euro- and mixed Native-American descent and four—*twice as many*—were from Asia (Thailand),<sup>68</sup> speaking otherwise to the prevalent myth that western women were the majority leaders in these early first-wave Theravāda ordinations. For the 1988 International Bhikkhunī Ordination at Hsi Lai as well, of the twelve women of Theravāda traditions who received full *upasampadā* ordination as bhikkhunīs, three were westerners from Germany and USA, while nine—*three times the number*—were from Theravāda traditions in the Asian countries of Sri Lanka, Nepal, Burma and Thailand.<sup>69</sup> At this stage, all of the training and ordaining masters were from Asian Buddhist traditions in Asia.<sup>70</sup> But that was very soon to change.

### **“Meeting in the Middle”: Northern and Southern Traditions & the Early International Ordinations**

Returning to the context of these earlier international ordinations, we find larger movements in the world at play. The founding masters of Buddhism in Taiwan were bhikkhunīs and bhikkhus who escaped the cultural revolution in China. So too, for the late Venerable Master Hsuan Hua 宣化上人, one of the early great Chinese Chán meditation tradition masters from mainland China who came via Hong Kong to settle in the United States and teach internationally. Master Hua was the founding teacher of what was to become another great international movement, the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association 法界佛教總會, which began in Northern California.

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<sup>67</sup> Ven. Henepola Gunaratana Mahā Thero (Bhante G) went on to ordain further sāmaṇerīs at the Bhavana Society including: Sucintā (Germany), Sudinnā (Sri Lanka/America), Sudhammā (North Carolina), Sobhanā (Iowa) Gunānūsārī (Vietnam/Canada) and Susīlā (Vietnam/America); all of whom he supported to subsequently ordain as bhikkhunīs in India, Sri Lanka and USA.

<sup>68</sup> Per author’s personal Messenger correspondence with Chutima Vucharatavintara and personal interview with Ven. Dr. Walpola Piyananda (August 2016)

<sup>69</sup> Per review of photos of Theravāda ordination group provided by Ven. Dhammā Mahātherī and Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen. Note: the Thai bhikkhunīs have not been identified in this photo, and yet are attested to by Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammanandā’s 13 Dec 2008 talk “[Contemporary Development on Bhikkhuni Sangha](#)” at the University of Sydney. However Tomomi Ito has identified at least one of the Thai participants as of the Mahāyāna tradition. If the Thai bhikkhunī ordines cited by Ven. Dhammanandā are included in the counting, the number would be fourteen, nearly four times as many.

<sup>70</sup> Per Dec 2016-Jan 2017 personal correspondence with ordinations attendees Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Choedroen and Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Chi Kwang Sunim, and auditor Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen.



For Buddhist teachers from Taiwan like the earlier mentioned Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the political situation in Taiwan constrained their aspirations. In the early eighties, for example, there was martial law and monastic ordinations were not allowed for a period of time. The establishment of Hsi Lai “Coming to the West” in the United States in Southern California was a banner of hope and freedom for them. The first International Ordinations of 1988, held shortly after Hsi Lai’s Grand Opening, were not only for internationals of other Buddhist traditions, but for Chinese/Taiwanese internationals as well.<sup>71</sup> The initial inclusion of guest teachers of various Buddhist traditions in the 1988 Ordinations at Hsi Lai in Southern California, was soon to be taken one step further in the USA in Northern California, by Master Hua.

The late Venerable Master Hsuan Hua began to teach and support the ordination of western bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs early on, after arrival in the United States from mainland China via Hong Kong, beginning in 1969.<sup>72</sup> He and the well-known western teacher from Seattle, Ajahn Sumedho of the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah, acknowledged having a profound karmic connection



Master Hua and Dharma Realm Buddhist Association monastics visit Ajahn Sumedho and bhikkhus of the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah

<sup>71</sup> Author’s personal interview with Hsi Lai’s Ven Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Mankuang (Aug 2016)

<sup>72</sup> Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, “A Brief Account of the Life of Our Venerable Master Hsüan Hua (1918-1995)”. Web: <http://www.drba.org/our-founder.html> (accessed 6 Jan 2017)

from past lives of cultivation of the Way together. The original land for the Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery, a monastery in the lineage of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho in Northern California, was donated by Master Hua, and the two traditions developed friendship with one another in both England and the United States, as well as internationally.<sup>73</sup>

Not long after the 1988 International Ordinations at Hsi Lai in Southern California, the time came for the full/higher ordination of both bhikkhu and bhikkhunī disciples of Master Hua at the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas 萬佛聖城 in Northern California. Venerable Vipassi Bhikkhu remembers:

In 1989, a dozen of our bhikkhus - along with Theravāda and Mahāyāna monks from various parts of the world - were invited to participate in a large-scale ordination ceremony at the City, it being Master Hua's intention to stimulate auspicious occasions when the two traditions would work together. Last year, the Venerable Master led a delegation of monks, nuns and lay people to Europe, which visited Amaravati and Chithurst.

During this visit the Master again expressed his view that it was high time that the Northern and Southern traditions took more opportunities to work together amicably as disciples of the Buddha, rather than feeling separated by their differences. In the light of this developing spirit of co-operation, I looked forward with special interest to our visit.

After descriptions of the surprisingly cool and foggy Northern Californian environs and the wonderful, dedicated practice environment at the Sagely City, he goes on to say:

About twenty-five monks acted as Precept Masters: eight from our sangha (including Ajahn Sumedho), Ajahn Pasanno from Wat Pah Nanachat, some Vietnamese elders, some Chinese elders, Ajahn Khantipalo from Wat Buddha-Dhamma in Australia, some monks from Wat Dhammakaya in Thailand, and our old friend, the 103-year-old Bhante Dhammavaro - as well as the monks from the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. The Venerable Master Hsuan Hua was too ill due to a kidney disorder to officiate at most of the proceedings and only appeared briefly; he requested Ajahn Sumedho to stand in for him as Upajjhaya (preceptor).<sup>74</sup>

It is noteworthy that according to the practice tradition of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, although there is a large bhikkhunī sangha with numerous Dharma masters in residence, both bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs are

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<sup>73</sup> As related by Ven. Dharma Master Heng Sure during the 2014 visit and teaching of Ajahn Sumedho at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas.

<sup>74</sup> Vipassi Bhikkhu, "Visiting the City of 10,000 Buddha's," Forest Sangha Newsletter, Oct. 1991. Web: <http://fsnewsletter.org/html/18/visit.htm> (accessed 8 Jan 2017)

ordained by the Dharma masters of the Bhikkhu Sangha.<sup>75</sup> Up into the 20th century, many bhikkhunīs' ordinations in China, Taiwan, Vietnam and South Korea have been performed in this way, in a practice dating back to the earliest days of Buddhism in China.

When Loung Por Sumedho recently returned to the Sagely City on invitation to give a Dhamma talk, the abbot of the monastery sitting next to him, Dharma Master Heng Lyu 恒律法師, acknowledged Ajahn Sumedho with gratitude as his *upadhyāya* (Pali: *upajjhāya*, preceptor).<sup>76</sup>



Master Heng Sure and CTTB abbot Master Heng Lyu with Ven. Madawale Seelawimala Mahathero, Ajahn Pasanno and bhikkhus of Sri Lankan, Thai forest and Chinese traditions together with new bhikkhu and bhikkhunī ordines at the 13th Ordination Ceremony for Transmission of the Complete Precepts City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on Aug 9, 2013

The year 1989 was not the last time that Theravāda bhikkhus were invited to join in the higher ordinations of bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs at the Sagely City; rather this has become a regular tradition, with Theravāda bhikkhu teachers and elders participating in the ordinations, not only from Abhayagiri Monastery,<sup>77</sup> but

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<sup>75</sup> Per senior bhikṣuṇī Ven. Dharma Master Heng Liang 比丘尼恒良法師, 19th Western Buddhist Monastic Gathering, City of the Dharma Realm (2013)

<sup>76</sup> “Ajahn Sumedho at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas” YouTube streamed live on July 13, 2014. Web: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yIIgC9\\_Npk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yIIgC9_Npk) (accessed 3 Jan 2017). See also “Receiving an Honored Guest” on the DRBU “dharma” blog posted 10 August 2014. Web: <http://blog.drбу.org/?p=4479> (accessed 3 Jan 2017).

<sup>77</sup> The 12th Ordination Ceremony for Transmission of the Complete Precepts at the Sagely City of Ten Thousand Buddhas had only the participation of Theravāda tradition monastics from Abhayagiri Monastery. Photos can be found here: <http://www.cttbusa.org/12ordination/cttb.asp>



also from other local Sri Lanka and Thai Theravāda temples.<sup>78</sup> And this was not to be one way only either, as several of Master Hua's senior bhikkhu disciples, including Dharma Master Heng Sure 恆實法師, have also time by time participated in the bhikkhu ordinations at Abhayagiri Monastery from the beginning.<sup>79</sup>



Bhikkhu Ordination at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery with Ajahn Pasanno as preceptor, Thai forest bhikkhu sangha and Dharma Realm Buddhist Association bhikkhu guest master

This was not a trend of Sangha harmony exclusive to Mahāyāna masters. I have a rather profound memory of the time shortly before my own bhikkhunī ordination in 1997. My preceptor-to-be, Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra, then in such poor health his participation in the upcoming ordination was doubtful, called myself and the other ordination candidates, together with the ordination training teachers, into his office at the College of Buddhist Studies, where a raisable sickbed-chair had been arranged, his body laid upon it. He wanted to be sure that those of us undertaking full ordination would not come to be of a certain type—he did not want to support that. What type was he speaking of?

He explained that when he first came to Los Angeles, he truly found the “melting pot” of religions and cultures American was famed for. However, in Buddhism, he discovered so many small ethnic and sectarian enclaves, many

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<sup>78</sup> Dharma Forest: Deep Roots Ancient Wisdom, “Ordination at City of Ten Thousand Buddhas,” posted Aug 10, 2013. Web: <http://www.dharmaforest.community/2013/08/ordination-at-city-of-ten-thousand-buddhas.html> (accessed 3 Jan 2017). See also the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association Gallery at: <http://www.drba.org/gallery.html>.

<sup>79</sup> “Our First Ordination,” Fearless Mountain newsletter, Summer 1998/2541 (Vol. 3, No. 2). Web: [http://1999.fosss.org/www.dharmanet.org/Abhayagiri/News/fmtn\\_3\\_2.html](http://1999.fosss.org/www.dharmanet.org/Abhayagiri/News/fmtn_3_2.html) (accessed 3 Jan 2017). See also: <http://www.blurb.com/images/uploads/catalog/08/676608/416499-14d4ed4ba6ff33255cdba375a809ba0b.jpg>



within just a few blocks distance from each other. Rather than treating one another as long-lost friends and family, most did not know each other. Worse still to his mind, a significant number claimed that they alone were passing on the authentic meaning and Way of the Buddha and disparaged each other, sometimes then even considering one another as enemies.

He quoted the Buddha's words on non-admirable practices of non-Buddhist sectarians from the Buddha's lifetime. The Buddha himself would quote them as saying: "Only this is right, everything else is wrong," and "Only I am right, everyone else is wrong," emphasizing that the Buddha was using this deliberately as an illustration of ignorant behavior not appropriate for Buddhist disciples. Bhante Ratanasāra did not want us to be fully ordained only to fall into this trap of divisive wrongdoing.

He also shared his broad historical vision: a vision of the earliest *ehi bhikkhus*, those who received the original "Come, Bhikkhu" ordination directly from the Buddha and then were sent by him, not two of them in the same direction, out to wander far and wide for the weal and welfare of the world: *bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya*—"for the good, the welfare, the benefit and the happiness of the many." Wandering far and wide they, as *arahantas*, "worthy ones," each with their own special strengths and qualities, then shared some certain bandwidth of the full spectrum and practice that was the Buddha's Dispensation.

He showed us a photograph of a beautiful ancient cave painting from Sri Lanka. All the Buddhist monastics in it on either hand of the Buddha looked as if they might have been painted from the same stencil. But he emphasized this is an illusion. Attached to name and form, the artist, seeing all with their shaven heads and robes, hears they were all awakened, and imagines them all the same. But, he stressed, the early disciples were not all the same; only in the salience of their shared common insight and liberation, but not in anything else. Each with their unique strengths and unique focus of teachings, they then spread out across the face of Middle Earth, and those with similar affinities and potentialities came to learn from them, in the context of local cultures and traditions. And out of this arose the traditions that we now see today; now, like long lost siblings, coming back together again in one pot, in one village.



International ordinees including Vietnamese and Tibetan traditions' bhikṣuṇīs ordained during first Grand Ordination at IBMC in 1994

"If we were to see such long-lost relatives after such a long time—how joyful, happy and welcoming we would be!" This is what he saw, and wished to share with us. "Like flowers in a field of myriad shapes and scents are gathered together by a ribbon or cord; so we are related and united by the *sutra*-thread of Dhamma-Vinaya." He challenged us: *if* we

could see this, *if* we could relate to this and uphold the spirit of harmony in the Sangha, then he wished to ordain us!<sup>80</sup>

After 1989, and subsequent to his appointment as chief prelate for the Sri Lankan Sangha of the Western Hemisphere, beginning in 1994,<sup>81</sup> Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra went on to himself serve as bhikkhu preceptor in a series of very public and widely-attended Grand Ordinations, which included dual bhikkhunī ordinations. These were co-organized by one of the very first generation of American bhikṣuṇīs in the Vietnamese tradition, Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma.



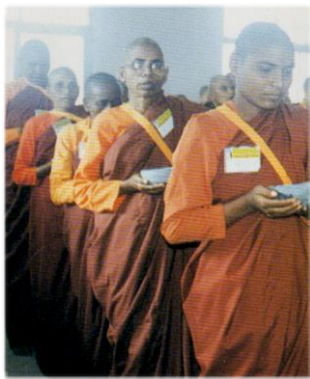
First International Grand Ordination at International Buddhist Meditation Center (IBMC) Los Angeles 2547 BE/1994 CE



Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra (on right) leading long procession of Theravāda bhikkhu sangha, Ven. Karuna Dharma (on left) leading procession of international Buddhist masters and bhikkhunīs to first Grand Ordination

<sup>80</sup> Tathālokā Therī, Grand Ordination Training recollections, International Buddhist Meditation Center and College of Buddhist Studies (1997).

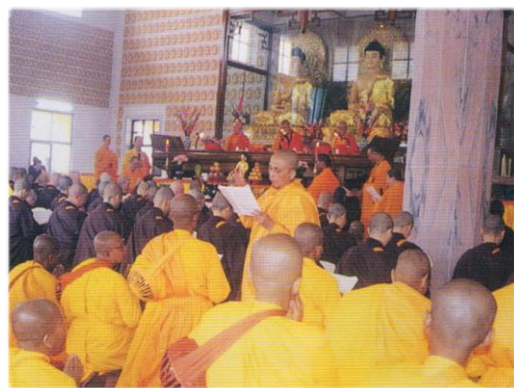
<sup>81</sup> International Buddhist Meditation Center (IBMC) held Grand Ordinations over a period of ten years, between 1994 and 2004. Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra, with the support and participation of Ven. Piyananda, also continued to grant the *sāmaṇerī* pabbajjā to Theravāda women aspirants during this period, including Thai-American Dr. Prem Suksawat, now Ven. Bhikkhunī Gotamī Therī, fully ordained in 2000 at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan. Ven. Gotamī Therī is the founder of Gotamī Buddhist Vihara, the first Theravāda bhikkhunī vihāra in the United States.



Twelve Nepali bhikkhunī  
ordination candidates 1998  
Bodhgaya



Indian bhikkhunī ordination candidates  
1998 Bodhgaya



Ven Bhikkhunī Kusuma translating for Sri Lanka  
bhikkhunī ordination candidates 1998 Bodhgaya

The Grand Ordinations were held at the International Buddhist Meditation Center (IBMC) in Los Angeles, directly across from the College of Buddhist Studies Bhante Ratanasāra had founded earlier. The Grand Ordination in 1994 at International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles was the first time in contemporary history known to the author in which Theravāda bhikkhu elders publicly served as preceptor (*upajjhāyā*), teachers (*ācariyā*) or ordaining (witnessing) sangha in the ordination of *Theravāda*, as well as other traditions,' bhikkhunīs. This was to continue. Up until his passing away, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra served as preceptor for Theravāda bhikkhunīs from four countries: Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Nepal and USA. With enormous magnanimity, he supported the full ordination of numerous bhikṣuṇīs of Vietnamese and Tibetan Mahāyāna traditions as well.

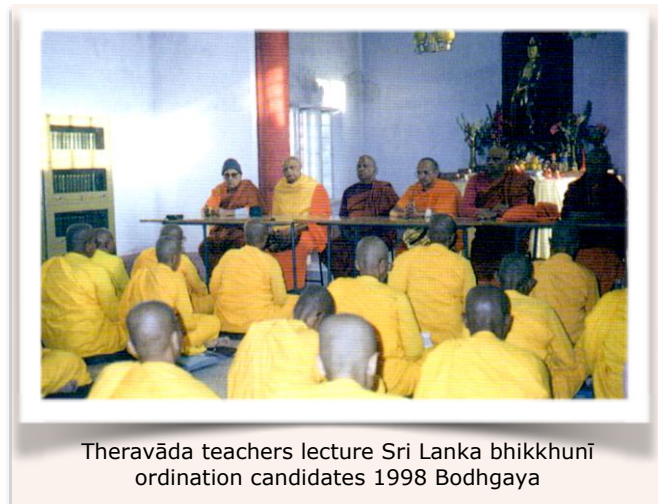
Fo Guang Shan and the Buddha's Light International Foundation also went on to extend their magnanimity by offering further international ordinations at which numerous Theravāda bhikkhunīs and Tibetan traditions' bhikṣuṇīs were ordained, founding the International Theravāda Outreach Department for more skillful management and follow-up. Ven. Dharma Master Chuehmen of the Theravāda Outreach Department, who served as an organizer and coordinator of both the 1998 and 2000 ordinations commented: "We as Chinese want to return our gratitude to Sri



Lanka's bhikkhunīs who gave us the precepts in the 4th century... We only want peace and harmony in the communities."<sup>82</sup>

The 1988 International Ordination at Hsi Lai was a marker for "Coming to the West." For Fo Guang Shan, the next 1998 International Ordination at Bodhgaya ten years later was a "Return to the Ancient Homeland,"

the site of the Buddha's *mahābodhi* or great awakening. Another twenty Theravāda bhikkhunīs from Sri Lanka were ordained there and more from Nepal too, as well as—very significantly—eighteen Theravāda bhikkhunīs from India. The Buddha's Fourfold Sangha of the Theravāda once again returned to its homeland—the Bhikkhunī Sangha of India was reborn. As stated in fliers and banners for the event, "In gratitude for having received the *Bhikshuni* lineage from Indian and Sri Lankan missionaries, the Chinese feel that it is their duty to return the lost *Bhikshuni* lineage to the ancestral lands..."<sup>83</sup>



Without in any way discounting or depreciating the Vinaya validity of earlier ordination methods,<sup>84</sup> for the Theravādans, in 1998, the transitional bhikkhunī revival ordination method was found that has been the most widely accepted and well-appreciated. This method, developed with cultural sensitivity based on learning from the

<sup>82</sup> Bhikkhunī Chuehmen, "The question on gratitude and rewriting history: The revival of the Bhikkhuni lineage in Sri Lanka." Sunday Island Online Edition (31 Jul 2005). Web: <http://www.island.lk/2005/07/31/features2.html> (accessed 2 Jan 2017)

<sup>83</sup> Dr. Hema Goonatilake, "The Unbroken Lineage of the Sri Lankan *Bhikkhuni* Sangha from 3rd Century B.C.E. to the Present" (2007) 17; Web: [http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/27HemaGoonatilake\\_01.pdf](http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/fileadmin/user_upload/27HemaGoonatilake_01.pdf) (accessed 3 Jan 2017)

<sup>84</sup> This is a statement from the understanding of the author.

previous years' experience, is that of the initial/foundational *pabbajjā* or "going forth" with the Theravāda bhikkhu sangha, followed by dual ordination with the International Sangha (with bhikkhunīs wearing their Theravādan robes), and completed by a *daḥhikamma*-type



"strengthening" confirmation/ordination by Theravāda bhikkhus alone—in order to determine and establish both the bhikkhunī lineage and the Theravāda tradition and lineage in them. As a transitional method, this was intentionally meant to be a stepping stone towards enabling the next step: dual ordinations according to the Pāli-text rite enacted by quorums of Theravāda bhikkhunīs and bhikkhus. The 1998 method was thus continued, when in 2000, a most suitable occasion arose to host another—third—such great, International Ordination at Fo Guang Shan's home monastery in Taiwan. The great occasion was the "2000 Year Anniversary of Buddhism in China."<sup>85</sup>

There, twelve great Theravāda masters from around the world participated, including both Ven. Walpola Piyananda and by then Chief Saṅghanāyaka of America of Malwatta Chapter, Ven. Dr. Henepola Gunaratana, who we've met earlier, as well as the Most Venerable Attudawe Rahula Mahāthera Mahānayaka of Rohana Chapter, Sri Lanka; Most Venerable Bodagama Chandima Mahāthera, Chief Saṅghanāyaka of Taiwan, R.O.C.; and Most Venerable Nyaneinda Mahāthera of Myanmar, along with Most Venerable Sundarananda Mahāthera of Bangladesh, to name a few.<sup>86</sup> More bhikkhunīs from Sri Lanka, Nepal, and also and most especially, four from Indonesia led by Ayyā

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<sup>85</sup> This ordination was also coordinated by Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Chueh Men of Fo Guang Shan's Theravāda Outreach Department, as was the 1998 Ordination in Bodhgaya, India. For a full listing of Fo Guang Shan ordinations, see Ven. Dharma Master Chueh Men's abstract "The Right to Be Ordained Bhiksunis" f2; Web: <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/38.0.html>

<sup>86</sup> Per author's personal email correspondence with 2000 bhikkhunī ordinee Ven. Bhikkhunī Gotami (Dr. Prem Suksawat) (2016). Confirmed through documents from Bhante Gunaratana's participation in the Bhavana Society archives. Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusumā from Sri Lanka was also invited as an honored bhikkhunī teacher and served as both translator and Ācarinī for the Sri Lankan bhikkhunī ordinees.

Santinī, came to be ordained. This resulted in another historic milestone: the initial revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Indonesia.<sup>87</sup>

With this ordination, and even before,<sup>88</sup> the transitional stage for seeding the revival of the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Sri Lanka and internationally was seen to be complete and established, with the tradition now able to stand on its own feet and once again become a refuge and a lamp for others from around the world. Not long after, in 2002 and 2003, the first international Theravāda-tradition dual ordinations of bhikkhunīs were held once again *in Sri Lanka*, both at Tapodanaramaya, Mt. Lavinia under the auspices of the Venerable Talalle Dhammaloka Mahāthero, and also at the Golden Temple, Rangiri Dambulla under the auspices of the Most Venerable Siri Sumangala Mahāthero.<sup>89</sup> Those ordained during these ordinations, together with their bhikkhu and bhikkhunī preceptors and teachers from Sri Lanka, in turn opened the door for the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in both Thailand and Vietnam. Since then, the Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Sri Lanka has grown to more than a thousand strong and Theravāda bhikkhunī ordinations there, both domestic and international, are held regularly at multiple locations. But let us return to our origins with the ordinations of thirty years ago. As it may be asked —

### **Where Are They Now? What Has Come of Them?**

One of the inspirations for writing this article and one of the joys in researching it has been to discover and learn more about where those who were ordained in the initial groundbreaking ordination of 1988, and where they and those who served as their teachers are now nearly 30 years later.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “Along with the ordination was born Persaudaraan Bhikkhunī Theravāda Indonesia, established January 1st of 2006 by Drs. I Wayan Suarjaya, M. Si, General Director of Bimbingan Masyarakat Hindu dan Buddha (Community Guidance for Hindu and Buddhist), Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia (Religion Department of the Republic of Indonesia),” from: Wisma Kusalayani “About Us”: <http://kusalayani.org/en/about-us/> (accessed 19 Jan 2017). The first four Indonesian Theravāda bhikkhunīs of contemporary times were Ayyās Santinī, Silavātī, Dhirasirinī and Dhammakumārī. Ven. Santinī Therī is the first Indonesian Theravāda bhikkhunī preceptor of modern times, serving in bhikkhunī ordinations in both Australia and Indonesia.

<sup>88</sup> All Theravāda dual ordinations began to be offered for Sri Lankan ten-precept nuns at Dambulla from 1998, with the senior-most and most highly qualified from among the bhikkhunīs ordained in Bodhgaya being appointed as bhikkhunī preceptors. Several of the bhikkhunīs ordained earlier in India reordained in this well-trained and well-organized communion; e.g. Bhikkhunī Bhadrā.

<sup>89</sup> Ranjini de Silva, “Reclaiming the Robe” in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Buddhist Women and Social Justice: Ideals, Challenges, and Achievements*, SUNY Press (2004) 133-134

<sup>90</sup> The Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs have been the most challenging to learn of. At least two of the five bhikkhunīs ordained in 1988 have formally continued their bhikkhunī life. They are Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadassikā Therī from Kiriwantuduwe and Ven. Bhikkhunī Vishākhā Dhammasīlā Therī from Horana, now living at Gothama



**Bhante Ratanasāra**, a preceptor and teacher to most of the early first wave of Theravāda bhikkhunīs and sāmaṇerīs in the 1980s, passed away in the year 2000 at the age of 80. A stupa was built for him by his bhikkhu nephew and faithful companion in the final years of his life, Ven. Havanpola Shanti, at Śrī Ratana Vihāra in his home village of Havanpola in Sri Lanka.<sup>91</sup> A portion of his ashes are enshrined there, as well as at the International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles, where he spent the last 20 years of his life. A beautiful documentary video was made of his life's work, which says much more: "The Life and Times of Ven. Havanpola Ratanasāra."<sup>92</sup>

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Asramaya in Sri Lanka. Ven. Dhammadassikā (also spelled Dhammadarśikā) is the ordination sister of another bhikkhunī who ordained later in 1996 in Sarnath, Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammavijithā Therī aka Bhikkhunī Vijithā (per Mdm. Ranjani De Silva, 7 Jan 2017, and updated per Ven. Bhikkhunī H. Supeshalā, 7 Feb 2017). Of the other three Sri Lankan bhikkhunīs who ordained, according to Ven. Bhikkhunī Dhammadassikā, these include Ven. Elpitiye Piyadhammā (also spelled Priyadharmā), Ven. Haburugala Dhammasīlā, and one more whose name is not remembered (conveyed via email by Ven. Chuehmen 6 Jan 2017). Per further Jan. 2017 email correspondence with Ven. Chuehmen and others, with resistance from local bhikkhus, and in the absence of a bhikkhunī teacher and any established systems or further training for bhikkhunīs, the latter three bhikkhunīs continued to quietly and unbrokenly live their monastic lives in harmony with the *dāsa-sīla* nuns after their return to Sri Lanka; as at that time (from 1988-1989), the question of bhikkhunī ordination was hotly debated and contested in public spheres, which they were not prepared to engage with. Author's comment: Some have mistakenly assumed that these bhikkhunīs not performing the Uposatha-kamma or other Sanghakammas, or not holding Kāthina, means that they are not bhikkhunīs; however, it should be noted per Vinaya, not performing any of these actions for a period of time is a small and easily reconciled offence, and does not in any way invalidate a bhikkhu's or a bhikkhunī's ordination. Such dual ordination when rightly received is, per the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: 受大戒 白四羯磨如法成就得處所, "established in accordance with Dhamma [and thus] fit to stand," and is also per Pāli-text Bhikkhunī Vinaya: *samaggena ubhatosaṅghena ñatticatutthena kammena akuppena thānārahena upasampannāti bhikkhunī*, "unshakable and fit to stand" (unless destroyed by *pārājika*, such grave offence as to transgress the boundaries of Buddhist monastic life). It is the hope of the author that further follow-up and care may be possible with regard to these extremely courageous and dedicated monastic women.

<sup>91</sup> Images of the stupa: <http://www.urbandharma.org/ratana/images/SriRatnaVihara/stupa2.JPG.html>

<sup>92</sup> I would like to express my appreciation to Rev. Kusala Bhiksu of International Buddhist Meditation Center in Los Angeles for his finding this video, having it converted from VHS to digital and uploading it to YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhxxqinBXkO4>. It is my personal hope that through its accessibility Ven. Dr. Ratanasara's work will continue to share benefit and inspiration widely.





**Bhante Piyananda**, by the time Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra died, was himself a leading *mahāthera* or “great elder”. Since, he has been awarded as a monk of very high learning—*aggamahāpāṇḍita*—by the Myanmar Sangha<sup>93</sup> and has been appointed as the Chief *Sangha Nāyaka* of America for the Sri Lankan Sangha. At the time of this writing, he is now 60 years in monastic life and has continued his life’s work in offering both *sāmaṇerī* and *bhikkhunī* ordinations to women in Theravāda Buddhism in India at Sarnath, in Taiwan at Fo Guang Shan, and at both International Buddhist Meditation Center and Dharma Vijaya Buddhist Vihara in Los Angeles.<sup>94</sup>

He has lived long enough to not only see the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha in Sri Lanka, but to see some of the bhikkhunīs in the United States, whose ordinations he has supported, develop their own hermitages, monasteries and vihāras in California, such as Dhammadharini Monastery, Mahapajapati Monastery, Aranya Bodhi Awakening Forest Hermitage, Aloka Vihara Forest Monastery and Karuna Buddhist Vihara. And to see those bhikkhunīs whose ordinations he supported themselves become preceptors, *ācariyas* and teachers, and begin to ordain their own students and grand students.<sup>95</sup>

Ven. Dr. Piyananda is the author of several books, including the popular and iconic *Saffron Days in LA: Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America* and a sequel, *The Bodhi Tree Grows in LA*, where in chapter 17, “The Bhikkhunī Order,” he tells of his experiences in supporting the revival of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sāsana relevant to this essay.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See Stephen Long, “Myanmar Government Religious Title for Ven. Walpola Piyananda,” Asian Tribune (2013-03-20)

<sup>94</sup> *Dharma Vijaya* Commemorative Edition (2005/2549). Web: [http://www.dharmavijaya.org/Downloadable\\_files/Full\\_magazine.pdf](http://www.dharmavijaya.org/Downloadable_files/Full_magazine.pdf)

<sup>95</sup> It was 20 years after the elder bhikkhu teachers began ordaining women aspirants as *sāmaṇerīs*, in 2008, when now elder bhikkhunī *therīs* began bestowing the Pabbajjā on their aspiring women students. For the first such case, see: [awakening-forest-hermitage.blogspot.com/2008/06/first-ordination-on-land.html](http://awakening-forest-hermitage.blogspot.com/2008/06/first-ordination-on-land.html). For the first second generation bhikkhunī ordination in North America, see “Joy > Dhammadharini’s 5-Year Anniversary & Bhikkhuni Ordination at the Hermitage” on the Aranya Bodhi: Awakening Forest Hermitage blog (29 Aug 2010). Web: [awakening-forest-hermitage.blogspot.com/2010/08/joy.html](http://awakening-forest-hermitage.blogspot.com/2010/08/joy.html)

<sup>96</sup> Bhante Walpola Piyananda, *The Bodhi Tree Grows in LA: Tales of a Buddhist Monk in America*, Shambala Publications (2008) pp 133-143. Note: in “The Bhikkhuni Order” chapter, p 134, paragraph one, should say: “October 1979,” rather than “October 1997”.



**Ayya Khema's** story is well known, as she was highly renowned and active as a teacher internationally. She is the first western woman known to have become a Theravāda Buddhist ten-precept nun, ordained in 1979 by the eminent Nārada Mahā Thero. Ayyā Khemā went on to found several monasteries east and west and ordain her women monastic disciples herself. She had very many students, and published twenty-five English- and German-language Dhamma books and teaching videos of enduring popularity, including *Be An Island, Being Nobody Going Nowhere, Who Is My Self, Know Where You're Going* and *Visible Here and Now*. The year before the Hsi Lai Ordination found Wat Buddha-Dhamma, the first Theravāda forest monastery in Australia which she was a main participant in founding, already established for ten years. At that time, the Parappuduwa Nuns' Island in Sri Lanka, where she supported the ordination of her first women monastic disciples as ten-precept-nuns, had been established for three years,<sup>97</sup> and Citta Bhavana in Australia's Southern Highlands (later to become the bhikkhunīs' Santi Forest Monastery) of which she served as a founding trustee, had been established just one year earlier.

In 1987, Ayyā Khemā became the first Buddhist woman monastic to address the United Nations as an invited lecturer on the topic of "Buddhism and World Peace." That same year, she both co-organized and participated in what came to be known as the first Sakyadhita International Buddhist Women's Conference in Bodhgaya, with HH the Dalai Lama as the keynote speaker. In 1989, after her full ordination as a bhikkhunī at Hsi Lai, Buddha-Haus in Germany was established under her auspices. In June of 1997, the first German forest monastery, Metta Vihara, was also established and inaugurated, with the first ordinations in Germany taking place there.<sup>98</sup> Her biography, *I Give You My Life*,<sup>99</sup> was also published in 1997, which came to be the year she passed away. It was also the year of the author's bhikkhunī ordination, one of the many women inspired and encouraged by her.

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<sup>97</sup> Due to political troubles in Sri Lanka, she was not able to continue with the Nuns' Island after this time. See "Parappuduwa Nuns' Island" in *The Island* (20 September 2014) for the story.

<sup>98</sup> See Parappuduwa: Web site about Parappuduwa Island > "Ayya Khema". Web: <http://parappuduwa.info/ayya-khema/> (accessed 13 Jan 2017)

<sup>99</sup> Borrow ebook: [https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1894129W/I\\_Give\\_You\\_My\\_Life](https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1894129W/I_Give_You_My_Life)

Many of those women who were her students and cohorts have now themselves gone on to full ordination and leadership positions in the nascent Theravāda Bhikkhunī Saṅgha. To name a few:

Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusumā Mahātherī, then the householder mother and molecular biologist Kusuma Devindra, arranged and supported Ayyā Khemā's groundbreaking ten-precept nun ordination with Ven. Nārada Thero. She went on to do an in-depth study of the Sri Lankan nuns, gain two PhDs in Bhikkhunī Vinaya and ordain as a bhikkhunī herself in the further groundbreaking ordination in 1996 in Sarnath, India.<sup>100</sup> Her close association with Ayyā Khemā led her to name the mediation center she later founded in Olaboduwa, Horana, Sri Lanka "Ayya Khema International Buddhist Meditation Centre" aka "Ayya Khema Mandir."<sup>101</sup>

Ven. Bhikkhunī Ajahn Vāyāmā initially ordained as a ten-precept nun with Ayyā Khemā's support<sup>102</sup> at Parappuduwa Nuns' Island in Sri Lanka in 1985. After further time training at Amaravati Monastery in England, she went on to found Dhammasara Nuns Monastery with the support of Ajahn Brahm and the Buddhist Society of Western Australia, and lead the community of ten-precept nuns there. She was the senior-most of the nuns to be fully ordained with the author as preceptor in 2009 in Australia, when Dhammasara converted to a bhikkhunī's' monastery.<sup>103</sup>

Ven. Ayyā Sucintā Therī, who also studied with Ayyā Khemā in the Nuns' Island in Sri Lanka and with Ajahn Sumedho at Amaravati, began her entry into monastic life as an *anāgārikā* in England, and then later received the Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā with Bhante Gunaratana at the Bhavana Society. She ordained as a bhikkhunī in Bodhgaya in 1998 and subsequently helped to found both Dhammadharini in the US and Sanghamittarama (now the Newbury Buddhist Monastery) in Australia. She now serves as the resident teacher of the Anenja

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<sup>100</sup> Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusumā is known to many as "Sri Lanka's first bhikkhunī," due to her eminence, popularity and perseverance, which greatly contributed to the comparative success of the 1996 ordination with regards to reviving the Bhikkhunī Sāsana in Sri Lanka.

<sup>101</sup> Per: <http://www.bhikkhunikusuma.info/bhikkhunikusuma.html> (accessed 17 Jan 2017). Ven. Bhikkhunī Kusumā travelled to Korea and translated the bhikkhunī precepts of the Dharmaguptaka tradition in Sinhalese, later serving as the Sinhalese-English translator both for the 1996, 1998 and year 2000 ordination's Sri Lankan candidates and ordinees.

<sup>102</sup> Ven. Anuragoda Piyaṭana Mahāthero, the late head monk of the Polgasduwa Island Hermitage in Dodonduwa, was Sister Vayama's 10-precept ordination preceptor.

<sup>103</sup> See "Ajahn Vayama | Patacara Bhikkhuni Hermitage" for a full biography.

Vihara in Germany, where the first bhikkhunī ordination in Europe happened in 2015.

Ayyā Nirodhā Bhikkhunī, who as a laywomen assisted Ayyā Khemā in her teachings and establishment of Wat Buddha Dhamma and Citta Bhavana in Australia, later left high society life to go forth as a ten-precept nun with Ajahn Brahm and Ajahn Vāyāmā, and fully ordained with the author as preceptor in 2009 in Australia at Bodhinyana Monastery. After serving for several years as co-abbot of Dhammasara in Western Australia, she has returned after many years to Santi Forest Monastery in Australia's Southern Highlands outside Sydney.

It is also important to mention Susan Pembroke, a student of Ayyā Khemā's and meditation teacher in Ayyā Khemā's tradition, who in 2006 founded the education and support organisation, the Alliance for Bhikkhunis, and served as its first president (now retired). Founding the Alliance for Bhikkhunis was Susan's way of showing gratitude to Ayyā Khemā and honoring her memory.



**Dhammawati Guruma** (Dhammavātī Mahātherī) is another of the now very senior and highly-renowned Buddhist monastic women ordained at Hsi Lai. Her young monastic life is an amazing and awe-inspiring story, including walking on foot from Nepal to Burma, where she attained a very high level of Buddhist studies. Her biography, *Beloved Daughter: the Story of Dhammawati Guruma*, has just been published in 2016 in English translation.

In the 1980s, in an audience with HH the Dalai Lama, Guruma Dhammawati asked His Holiness whether, in his opinion, women and men have equal spiritual potential and, if so, whether women can and should be ordained. On both counts he answered in the affirmative and urged her to seek ordination. After a few months she was visited in Kathmandu by Taiwanese nuns from Hsi Lai Temple. After observing and admiring Dhammawati's work, and that of her associates and disciples, they invited her and three others nuns to Hsi Lai in 1988 to receive upasampada via the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya dual ordination, as passed down in the Chinese Buddhist Vinaya tradition.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Story of the Taiwanese bhikṣuṇīs from Hsi Lai's visit and invitation: Sarah LeVine, "At the Cutting Edge: Buddhist Nuns in the Kathmandu Valley," Ch 2 of Karma Lekshe Tsomo's *Innovative Buddhist Women: Swimming Against the Stream*, Routledge (2013) 13



Guruma Dhammawati accepted the invitation, and ordained as a bhikkhunī in 1988 together with three of her nun sisters, including two other famed nun leaders: Gunawati Guruma (Guṇavātī Mahātherī) from Burma and Sujata Guruma (Sujātā Mahātherī). In 1998 in Bodhgaya, more of her Nepalese nun sisters came for full bhikkhunī ordination, and still more in Taiwan in 2000. The same year, the 6th Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women's Conference was held in Nepal, in Lumbini, the site of the Buddha's birth. Numerous bhikkhunī and anāgārikā vihāras have been established in Nepal under Guruma Dhammawati's tutelage and patronage, and she serves as the president of the Nepalese Bhikkhunī Anuyayī Anagārikā Sangha Association. In 1995, the government of Myanmar awarded her as an *Aggamahāganthanwacakhā Panditā*, for her extremely high level of knowledge of the Buddhist teachings. After Burmese leader Daw Ang Sang Suu Kyi obtained her freedom following years of house arrest in Burma, she came to pay her respects to Guruma Dhammawati at Dharmakirti Vihara in Nepal. Guruma had been a nun mentor and teacher of hers at a young age.<sup>105</sup> More can be read of her life in Punyawati Gurama's "Two Generations of Eminent Nepalese Nuns" in *Eminent Buddhist Women* edited by Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo.



**Chi Kwang Sunim** 지광(智光) 스님<sup>106</sup> is an Australian-born bhikṣuṇī elder dually-ordained at Hsi Lai in 1988, with an early connection to Ayyā Khemā. Ven. Chi Kwang participated in the founding of Wat Buddha Dhamma in Australia with Khantipalo and Ayyā Khemā (then Ilse Ledermann), whom she attended for two years. She began her entry into monastic life as a Theravāda eight-preceptor at Wat Buddha Dhamma, then two years later travelled to Thailand, where she met the young Ajahn Brahm<sup>107</sup> while visiting forest meditation masters.

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<sup>105</sup> YouTube of their meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISPZCXibUYI>

<sup>106</sup> Unless noted otherwise, in Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim's biographical section, all biodata comes from or has been verified via personal email, Dropbox and Word online correspondence with Ven. Chi Kwang (Dec. 2016 - Jan. 2017).

<sup>107</sup> Ven. Chi Kwang has worked closely with Ajahn Brahm and Bhante Sujato in establishing the Australian Sangha Association, and has been active together with them in representing Australian Buddhism and its Sangha at various national and international conferences.

South Korea offered her opportunities for bhikkhunī training not then available in Thailand, and to study with the late world-renowned Seon meditation master Venerable Kusan Sunim 九山禪師. In 1973, the master began accepting foreign students who wished to ordain as bhikkhus and bhikkhunīs and train at Song Kwang Sa's Puril International Meditation Center 佛日國際禪院. The ancient Song Kwang Sa, Expansive Pine Monastery 松廣寺, is the Sangha Jewel Monastery among the Three Jewels 三寶寺刹 in South Korea. In autumn of 1979, Kusan Sunim shaved her head and gave her a preliminary set of robes and the name Chi Kwang 智光, Light of Wisdom.

With her "going forth" *chul-ga* 出家 (*pabbajjā*), she began as an *anāgārikā* postulant known in Korean as a *haeng-ja* 行子, training at Song Kwang Sa, then continued her training of eight months with her *eun-sa* 恩師 bhikkhunī mentor Ven. Dr. Myeong Seong Sunim 法界明星 和尚<sup>108</sup> at Cheong Do Un Mun Sa 清道 雲門寺, the "Cloud Gate" Monastery. Un Mun Sa is an ancient Shilla Dynasty monastery and one of Korea's foremost bhikkhunī training seminaries and Sangha colleges. Chi Kwang Sunim's *eun-sa sunim* is the restorer of this ancient monastery. She was both the abbess of the monastery and dean of the seminary for more than twenty years and is known as Korea's foremost bhikkhunī Dharma teacher and preceptor. It was there during that time that Ven. Chi Kwang's real training to become a bhikkhunī began.

Chi Kwang Sunim undertook her *sāmaṇerī* precepts *sāminī gye* 沙彌尼戒 at Song Kwang Sa with Bo Song Sunim 菩成和尚 as preceptor and Il Ta Sunim 日陀律師 as main lecturing Vinaya Master. Three years later, she received higher ordination as a bhikkhunī 比丘尼具足戒 at Song Kwang Sa's Sangha Jewel Hall Precepts Platform 僧寶殿 戒壇,<sup>109</sup> with the late Great Vinaya Master "Compassionate Cloud" Ja Un Sunim 慈雲堂盛祐大律師 as her preceptor and the renowned monk Il Ta Sunim as *ācarya*.<sup>110</sup> Seong Kwang Sa Vinaya Master Ven.

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<sup>108</sup> To learn more about the Venerable Myeong Seong Sunim:  
<http://terebess.hu/zen/mesterek/Myeongseong.html>

<sup>109</sup> A precepts' platform 戒壇 is an area formally agreed upon by the Sangha for ordinations, in this case within the Sangha Jewel Hall 僧寶殿, which was established as the place for ordinations to be held within the greater monastery compound.

<sup>110</sup> Although Ven. Chi Kwang had a bhikkhunī mentor, this was a one-sided higher ordination with a bhikkhu preceptor and teachers, an old tradition once common across East Asia, still in practice at that time. After several years of preparations involving both the Korean bhikkhu and bhikkhunī Vinaya Masters and preceptors, including Il Ta Sunim, Bo Seong Sunim, Myeong Seong Sunim, Myo Eom Sunim and others; the dual ordination was revived in 1982 at Beom Eo Sa "Brahma Fish Monastery" 梵魚寺's Tae Seong Am "Great Realisation Hermitage" 大成庵. Sakyadhita co-founder and long-time president, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo was one of those ordained as a bhikṣuṇī at that time. (Per email correspondence with Chi Kwang Sunim 18 Jan

Bo Seong Sunim, who we meet later in the story at Hsi Lai, was one of her ordination masters.

Ten years into her monastic life, in 1987, Ven. Chi Kwang was invited by Ayyā Khemā and Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo to Bodhgaya, India for the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns. She was not able to attend in person due to a serious illness; however her paper, "Living As a Buddhist Nun," was read at the conference and later published in *Blossoms of the Dhamma* and various journals. Although not physically present, she became a founding member of the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, established at the end of the Conference.

With the encouragement of Ven. Bo Seong Sunim 菩成律師, they travelled to the United States for the first International Ordination at Hsi Lai Temple in 1988. Ven Bo Seong Sunim—who was later to become one of the Korean Jogye Order's National Preceptors and is now Spiritual Director for Song Kwang Sa and its branch temples and hermitages—audited the training and dual ordination procedures and also served as one of the international guest teachers for the 1988 Bhikkhunī Ordinations. This was a time rich in inquiry between leading international masters, and Ven. Chi Kwang served as one of the Korean-English translators, while also fully participating as a trainee and ordinee in the ordination training and the ordination itself.

Around the time of the ordinations, while in the USA, Ven. Chi Kwang, together with Ven. Ayyā Khemā, and bhikṣuṇīs Ven. Dr. Karuna Dharma and Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, participated in the initial foundation of Sakyadhita USA and the registration of Sakyadhita International, as well as the Grand Opening of Hsi Lai Temple and the World Fellowship of Buddhists Conference at Hsi Lai. Ven. Chi Kwang also worked closely together with Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra and Ven. Karuna Dharma on several projects during this time. She observed Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra's keen interest to further the education and development of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sāsana, with especial care and consideration for the Sri Lankan *dasa-sil-mata* ten-precept nuns.

After a very full time in the States, Ven. Chi Kwang returned to South Korea, where she lived and trained for a total of 20 years, both in the intensive three-month long communal retreats, in Dhamma study with excellent sutra

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2017). To learn more about the revival of dual ordination in South Korea, see Chung, Inyoung (Sukhdam Sunim)'s "The Revival of Dual Ordination for Korean Buddhist Nuns in the Modern Period" paper presented to the First International Conference on Buddhist Women, Hamburg Germany (2007): <http://www.congress-on-buddhist-women.org/fileadmin/files/19InyoungChung.pdf>

teachers, as well as in seclusion in Korea's small mountain forest hermitages. In the early 1990's, she also spent another year at Un Moon Sa, where she further studied the *Yushik Hak* 唯識學 Mind Only Teachings of the *Yogācāra/Cittamātra/Vijñānavāda* School as well as those of *Hwaeom Gyeong* "Flower Garland" *Mahāvaiṣṇava Buddhāvataṣṭaka Sūtra* 大方廣佛華嚴經. Ven. Chi Kwang's *eun-sa sunim* was later to be appointed a Korean National Bhikkhunī Preceptor, became the elder bhikkhunī mentor of the author,<sup>111</sup> and was elected the Executive President of the Korean National Bhikkhunī Association 大韓佛教曹溪宗全國比丘尼會 Council of Elders.

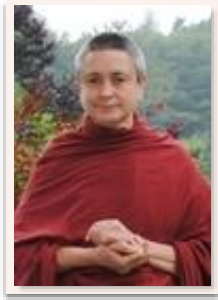
After twenty years of training in the South Korean temples, monasteries and hermitages, Ven. Chi Kwang returned to her native Australia where she established the Chonghye Sa "Samadhi and Wisdom" Seon Centre 정혜사 선원 定慧寺 禪院, a Buddhist retreat in the forested mountain of Kinglake, Victoria. She's travelled and taught extensively, both nationally and internationally, and is often invited to present at intra-Buddhist, Interfaith and environmental gatherings. Ven. Chi Kwang has served as the chair of the Australia Sangha Association, as well as being one of the regular teachers for the Buddhist Society of Victoria.

With the establishment of the Theravāda Bhikkhunī Sangha in Australia, with her long-time close association with the Theravāda communities, since 2007 Ven. Chi Kwang has served as one of the senior bhikṣuṇī mentors and advisors for the developing bhikkhunīs' communities at Dhammasara Monastery in Western Australia, Santi Forest Monastery in the Southern Highlands of NSW, and also Sanghamittarama and then the Newbury Buddhist Monastery outside Melbourne. *Blossoms of the Dharma: Living as a Buddhist Nun* contains a chapter by Ven Chi Kwang on the monastic life and training in South Korea, and the new book *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-five Centuries of Awakened Women* also contains Chi Kwang Sunim's reflection.

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<sup>111</sup> The Dhamma name/Buddhist monastic name "Tathālokā" (in Korean pronounced "Yeo Kwang" 여광 釋如光) was given by her. See "My Venerable Elder Korean Bhikkhuni Mentor" for more.





**Dhammā Mahātherī** is a German-born Theravāda bhikkhunī elder who ordained as a ten-precept nun in Sri Lanka in 1984. There Sister Dhammā studied together with fellow German *dāsa-sīla* nun Sister Bhaddā under the tutelage of the eminent German bhikkhu Ven. Nyāṇaponika Thera, as well as with teachers in India. In 1988 in Calcutta, India she met an organizer of the International Bhikkhunī Ordination at Hsi Lai, who invited her to join the training. Elder bhikkhu teachers in India prepared her and offered her bhikkhunī robes and training in how to wear them before her departing for the USA for the training and ordination. So it was that she was able to wear the Theravāda bhikkhunī robes during the training and ordination, while others were not. She recollects:

The training we received from our Dhamma teachers at Hsi Lai was a very long period of almost one month. For our western way of socialisation, it was of very high discipline. The whole day was scheduled in group trainings. The organisation was almost perfect. With high respect and gratitude for all that was offered to us, we tried to do our best. The venerable Dhamma Masters showed a lot of patience and had always been with a helping hand at the right place. A number of real difficulties could be solved easily. Our most venerable teachers at Hsi Lai brought up the knowledge in different ways—from teachings up to everyday life trainings. May their efforts, the offered generosity, the support, and all the good wishes and helping hands, be of great benefit for Hsi Lai, the most venerable teachers, and all our venerable Dhamma sisters and brothers.<sup>112</sup>

Remembering Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra's presence and teaching during that time, she reflects:

The ordination period with its training [also] included the offer to visit other temples. So, fortunately, we had the opportunity to learn about Venerable Ratanasāra. In his Dhamma talk he inspired us to continue on our path. The bhikkhunī ordination was appreciated by him and he generously offered his support. In our meeting he had time for each of us to inquire [regarding] our individual approach to the Dhamma. It seemed he had an open eye for this. Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra helped me to understand that there have been periods in the Buddha's time of guidance which offered approaches in different ways according to the needs required by his followers to come to an understanding of the Dhamma. The open mind concerning our questions and needs helped us a lot. One might understand that there was a lot of uncertainty [for us] in how to live a bhikkhunī life. Especially because most of us had different backgrounds in training and culture. To keep the confidence that the right approach will be found by each of us and that we will be able to start with the bhikkhunī-life, was more valuable than can be said in words... The great support of the late most venerable Dr. Ratanasāra was one of those to accompany me for many years.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Personal correspondence with the author via fax between 24 Dec and 7 Jan 2017. My gratitude goes out to Ven. Dhammā Therī for her sharing of photos and long-distance correspondence during her hermit recluse time.

<sup>113</sup> Personal correspondence with the author via fax 22 Jan 2017.

After ordination, Bhikkhunī Dhammā returned to Asia for a further seven years of traditional monastic life training as a bhikkhunī before returning to Germany, where in 2007 she founded the Dhamma-Stiftung Kloster Hassel Hermit Village in the scenic Westerwald outside of Cologne. Ven. Dhammā, now a *mahātherī*, lives a quiet hermit life there to this day, welcoming now and then visitors to join in the hermitage practice together. She is the author of Leben und Lehre des Buddha (Life and Teaching of the Buddha) and Leben ist was Sterben trägt: Ein Handbuch zu Sterben und Tod (How Dying Supports Life: a Handbook on Dying and Death) in her native German language.



### **Gelongma Thubten Choedroen<sup>114</sup>**

དགེ་སློང་མ་ཐུབ་ཅུང་ལོ་སློང་།, born 1947 in Bavaria and raised in England was ordained as a getsulma (srāmaṇerikā) by the esteemed master Lama Zopa Rinpoche at the Nalanda Monastery in France. Geshe Thubten Ngawang and Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen of the Tibetan Center in Hamburg encouraged her to join the bhikṣuṇī training and ordination at Hsi Lai in 1988. She travelled to California together with

Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen who, as mentioned earlier, had recently been appointed the Head of the Vinaya Research Committee for the newly-founded Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women. Ven. Jampa Tsedroen served in the official role of observer together with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Karma Lekshe Tsomo. Ven. Thubten Choedroen was among eight Tibetan traditions' getsulmas of various countries who joined in the training, which had the benefit of the presence of both bhikṣu guest observer Tibetan teachers and a bhikṣuṇī (Ven. Jampa Tsedroen) with extensive Tibetan training in Vinaya to consult with when questions arose, as well as the Taiwanese ordination training teachers and other international guest teachers.

Ven. Thubten Choedroen especially noted Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra's public teaching at Hsi Lai during the ordination training period. In his teaching, he introduced and gave explication of the meaning of the Pāli text for requesting higher ordination and of all the types and stages of the precepts and their categories. He also gave an overview of the Pāli-text Vinaya and its structure,

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<sup>114</sup> Note spelling. Not to be confused with Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron from the United States who is the founding abbess of Sravasti Abbey in Washington State. The Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron now associated with Sravasti Abbey, then already a bhikṣuṇī, visited the 1988 Ordinations at Hsi Lai upon their completion.

gave a text critical analysis of the contents of the Pāli Canon and Vinaya, and also an overview and analysis of the then-contemporary state of women's monasticism and ordination in Theravāda Buddhism, especially in Sri Lanka, offering advice and guidance on personal emotional management in living an exemplary and progressive life as bhikkhu/nīs in harmony and understanding with the elders of the Sangha, many of whom would be slow to change. Bhante Ratanasāra strongly advised and recommended that [for acceptability and progress] those ordained in the west should be well trained before being sent to Sri Lanka.

With regard to this session of his teaching, it is especially noteworthy that twenty years before numerous mainstream Buddhist scholars began questioning the authenticity and historicity of the eight bhikkhunī *gārudhammas*, Ven. Dr. Ratanasāra, as an extremely highly educated monk, expressed his well-reasoned disbelief in the *gārudhammas* as being authentic textual transmission of the Word of the Buddha, crediting later disciples with their creation.<sup>115</sup> It is interesting to note that this was said by a well-educated elder male Asian master in a highly traditional training context, where the majority of male and female monastic trainees and teachers were from different Asian countries, with a minority of western women listeners.<sup>116</sup> His talk was given in English and translated into Chinese and Sinhalese.

A both interesting and significant long-term outcome emerging from the gathering of observing teachers for the 1988 International Ordinations at Hsi Lai is the contemporary conferral of the Geshema Degree to 20 Tibetan nuns, which occurred, after more than two decades of study and preparation, in the third week of December 2016, during the researching and writing of this article.

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<sup>115</sup> Ordination training notes written by Ven. Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Choedroen, shared in private correspondence with the author via email 25-27 Dec 2016: "Buddha is said to have made eight rules for women to enter Order — e.g., Even if a bhikṣuṇī is 100 years old she will have to pay respect to a newly ordained bhikṣu. Some doubt arises when we look at those eight. It is highly unlikely for Buddha to impose such restrictions, when we look at his teachings. At that time in India, there was strong class or caste system. Buddha introduced new structures. He firmly rejected the class/caste system, placing more importance on the qualities of the person. Buddha said that gender makes no difference. At times, females are wiser. It is difficult to accept these eight rules as having been made by Buddha. After Buddha's demise many things were included in the texts. Even in the sutras we find such things. Females had no standing at that time, no social significance at all. Although the social stigma was so strong, the Buddha decided to open the door to women. It is likely that certain disciples created these rules later."

<sup>116</sup> I mention this because text critical questions as to the historicity of the *gārudhammas* raised by monastic and non-monastic scholars of Buddhism in the 21st century have frequently been negatively attributed, by a number of contemporary Asian male teachers as well as Asian bhikkhunīs, to western feminists' wishful thinking.

Ven. Jampa Tsedroen recollects that during the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns in Bodhgaya, it was decided that education programs should be set up, before Asian Tibetan traditions' nuns be encouraged to go for full ordination. She writes:

Both Geshe Konchok Tsering and Ven. Kalsang Damdul, were sent by the Tibetan Department of Religion and Culture (DRC) in Dharamsala to observe the [2008] ordination [at Hsi Lai] and to report on the event. The plan was that we take all the meals in the temple. But in the morning, Geshe Konchok Tsering, Kalsang Damdul and myself preferred to stay in the Bungalow to do our daily recitations, studying the Vinaya and making notes before staying the rest of the day in the temple. I already knew Ven. Kalsang Damdul, because in 1987 he had accompanied the 97th Ganden throne holder to our centre. Together with the Ganden Tripa he had stayed for one week in our centre. So there was already a harmonious relationship.

Geshe Konchok Tsering was from Ganden Monastery (Shartse College), located in Doeguling Settlement close to Mundgod (between Goa and Hubli), the largest Tibetan refugee settlement in India. In 1987, after the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Nuns (nowadays referred to as "First Sakyadhita Conference" (Sakyadhita was only founded on the last day of the conference), on advice of H.H. the Dalai Lama, I visited Jangchub Choeling Nunnery འཇུག་པོའི་ཆོས་ལུགས་སྐྱོང་ཁོངས་. On behalf of Tibetisches Zentrum Hamburg I helped in starting an education programme. First I was planning to follow the education programme Ven. Lekshe set up at Jamyang Choeling, but I wanted the nuns to do the full geshe studies, i.e., the same studies the monks did. My teacher felt the same.

During the daily sessions in Hsi Lai temple I told Geshe Konchok Tsering that fundraising had been started for two teacher salaries in 1987, as well as a sponsorship programme for the Jangchub Choeling nuns. Geshe Konchok Tsering told me that the DRC had sent him on a three-month tour to Benedict monasteries and convents in the US. He said that he was impressed by the high-level standard of the nuns' education and discipline, and that this experience made him wonder why the nuns' situation is so different in the Tibetan tradition. This made him to feel a better understanding of why His Holiness the Dalai Lama wanted Tibetan nuns to become more educated, and he became highly motivated to contribute in this field. He said that actually the Benedict order had invited ten monks and ten nuns, but the DRC did not know which ten nuns to send, because [at that time] most of them were so poorly educated. Thus they apologised and said that at this time they could only send one monk (Geshe Konchok Tsering), one nun (Ven. Thubten Dekyong, better known as Ven. Tsenla, from Kopan, Nepal) and one translator (Ven. Kalsang Damdul, now a geshe and the director of the Institute for Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala).

[Three months after our time together at the Hsi Lai training and ordination in December of 1988,] in March of 1989 by letter he agreed to teach the nuns after his return from Virginia in April. In May 1989 I received the respective approval from the Office of H.H. the Dalai Lama. In July 1989 we were informed that the study programme has been started. Thus it took about two years for things to go ahead. In Vol. 3/1989 of the Tibetisches Zentrum's news magazine "Zentrumsnachrichten" (now "Tibet und Buddhismus") I reported about the situation of Tibetan nuns in exile, which provided for donations and sponsorships for about 30 nuns, (when I visited the nunnery in 1987 there were 22, now there are about 280). In the article I wrote 'Many other nuns are waiting for admission and the possibility, to study, like the monks, the teaching on a high level and to finish the study period with a Geshe examination.



On December 22, 2016, while writing this article, Ven. Jampa Tsedroen was in India to witness the first 20 Tibetan nuns'<sup>117</sup> Geshema Conferment Ceremony with HH the Dalai Lama, a very special and excellent extended result of the collaboration during the 1988 Ordinations at Hsi Lai.

Also Ven. Thubten Choedroen shared good news of the newly founded Buddhistisches Nonnenkloster Shide (Shide Buddhist Monastery) for women monastics in Schneverdingen, Germany, of which she is a co-founder. She is active with the Tibetischen Zentrum (Tibet Center) in Hamburg where she leads the courses and meditations, and serves as president of the Deutsche Buddhistische Ordensgemeinschaft (German Buddhist Monastic Union).



**Elder Master Mengcan.** We have one more follow-up story. Two of our research contributors, 1988 bhikṣuṇī ordinees Ven. Chi Kwang Sunim and Ven. Gelongma Thubten Choedroen above, mentioned an elder Chinese master, who had been imprisoned for three decades or more, as one of their guest lecturers at Hsi Lai Temple during the ordination training. Clearly he had made an impression, and in our review of the 1988 Ordination photographs he appeared in some very important places, including among the precept masters near to Master Hsing Yun, so we followed up. What was learned was inspiring. It was interesting to see the connections unfolding in the revival of the Bhikkhunī Sangha around the world, not only in South and Southeast Asia and the West, but now back in the ancient “Middle Country” of China as well.

The elder master, Ven. Mengcan 夢參老和尚, now 102 years old, was born in 1915 and entered Buddhist



Master Hsing Yun came to visit the elder master at the Pushou Si Bhikṣuṇī Monastery on a pilgrimage to Wu-tai Shan in 2015, on Elder Master Mengcan's 101st birthday

<sup>117</sup> 'In April 2011, Geshe Kelsang Wangmo, a western-born woman, made history by becoming the first female geshe, signaling a new era for nuns to excel scholastically and to take on important teaching roles that had traditionally been the domain of monks.' See: "The Joy of Study: An Interview with Geshe Kelsang Wangmo" in the FPMT's Mandala Magazine (Oct-Dec 2012). See also: 'Geshema Kelsang Wangmo: On Becoming The First Geshema' [Video] in which she 'describes how her earning a Geshema degree through the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics in April 2011 helped pave the way for Tibetan nunneries to begin awarding the degree to other qualified women.'

monastic life in China as a youth, guided by a dream. He was originally given the name 叫觉 “Method of Awakening;” however, he adopted the name Mengcan 夢參 “Dream Meditation” for himself. He eventually travelled to India, and then in 1941 to Tibet, where he stayed for ten years to study with, among others, the 10th Panchen Lama. Upon returning from Tibet to mainland China in 1950, due to change in government, he was imprisoned, initially for thirteen years. After volunteering to serve as translator for some imprisoned Tibetan lamas, he was incarcerated for another 20 years, from 1950 until 1983. Deciding to “own his own way,” he determined that prison was his place of retreat practice, relying upon *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* 華嚴經 teachings.

Again guided by a dream, upon release, he dedicated himself with full energy to active Dharma teaching at the Chinese Buddhist Academy in Beijing and other locations, until invited to the United States to teach in 1987. Then, in his mid-seventies, he was invited by Ven. Master Hsing Yun to Hsi Lai Temple, which was developed and is managed by the Fo Guang Shan Taiwanese bhikṣuṇīs’ community. As mentioned above, he served there as one of the guest lecturers during the month-long 1988 Ordination program. Numerous participants, both trainees and lecturers, have mentioned what a strong and changing impression it made upon them to be in a situation where bhikṣuṇīs are so well organized, so empowered and capacitated, as practitioners, Dhamma teachers and leaders. Given what comes later in the story, we wonder if this may have been so for the elder master too.

Despite his elder age, Elder Master Mengcan has been greatly energetic and active as a Dharma teacher internationally these past 30 years since his 70s at Hsi Lai, and even now “Ven. Mengcan” can be found on YouTube, Facebook, and a blog. In 2015, he moved to the historical Pushou Si Temple 普壽寺 of Wutai Shan 五台山, an ancient temple in the “Five Peaks Mountains” in China.

We found him at age 102 at the seat of HH the 13th Dalai Lama, now home of the Wutai Mountain Bhikṣuṇī Monastery and Buddhist Nuns Institute 五台山尼众佛学院, a



Pushou Monastery’s abbess and dean Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Rurui speaking to women monastic trainees

large community of around a thousand highly-educated, excellent Vinaya training bhikṣuṇīs, led by Pushou Monastery's abbess and dean Dharma Master Rurui "Thusness (above) Blessings (below)" 普寿寺住持 如瑞法师. Built up by the bhikṣuṇīs brick by brick, Pushou "Universal Life" Monastery is spoken of as the foremost of women's training monasteries in the contemporary revival of Buddhism in China, with deep rooted [re]founding connections with the Chinese bhikṣuṇī masters who have revived the Order in China; foremost of these, Pushou Si Monastery's late abbess, Dharma Master Longlian "Thriving Lotus" 隆莲法师 and elder bhikṣuṇī teacher Dharma Master Tong Yuan "Penetrating Will" 通愿法师.<sup>118</sup>

After visiting Pushou Si Monastery to teach in 1989, Elder Master Mengcan was invited to return as an elder master teacher in residence in 2001, while the



Wutai Mountains Bhikṣuṇī Monastery and Buddhist Nuns Institute 五台山尼众佛学院 after reconstruction

late abbess Ven. Longlian was still alive.<sup>119</sup>

It may be noted with regard to the gathering of multiple traditions' special guest teachers in 1988 at Hsi Lai, Master Hsing Yun came to visit the elder master at the Pushou Si Monastery on a pilgrimage to Wutai Shan in 2015, on Elder Master Mengcan's 101st birthday.

## From Renaissance to Renaissance

There are ways to engage with people and gender dynamics which are disempowering and disabling, often based in non-understanding and fear, if not in desire, aversion and delusion. And there are the ways, based on awakened principles and perspectives informed by the Buddha's salient teachings and lived example, which are just the opposite: unifying, empowering, uplifting and

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<sup>118</sup> See: "Chinese Bhiksunis in contemporary China: beliefs and practices on the Three-Plus-One Project," *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, (28 Aug 2015). Web: <https://internationaljournaldharmastudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40613-015-0020-6> (accessed 12 Jan 2017)

<sup>119</sup> Elder Master Mengcan is found on the "Teacher's Inheritance" 师资传承 page of Pushou Si Bhiksuni Monastery together with the re-founding abbess Ven. Longlian and Ven. Tong Yuan. Web: <http://www.pushousi.net/intro.aspx?id=3531&t=yzzl> (accessed 12 Jan 2017)

capacitating. Both the stories of Wutai Mountain's eminent Pushou Bhikṣuṇī Monastery in China and the Fo Guang Shan order in Taiwan, California and India, are shining examples of not only the renascence or rebirth of Buddhist traditions in both new and ancient contexts, but truly of a renaissance.

The revival of high-level education and training as represented by the Geshema training and conferral of the Geshema degree for women monastics in the Tibetan Nālandā traditions is also the beginning of a great renewal,<sup>120</sup> which will lead to a flourishing, and much benefit and growth within the tradition.

For Theravāda Buddhism, leading male teachers, and also female monastics and laywomen seeing firsthand the shining and admirable capabilities of women in Buddhism, not only in the ancient texts, but alive in the contemporary world, has begun to open up a new, renewed vision of what is possible for women monastics in Buddhism. The renascence of full opportunity for aspiring women in monastic life has begun, set into motion in very important ways between 1987 and 1989, and now in its 30-year anniversary. Within Theravāda, while advancements have been made, we have a way to go before this renascence can be said to be a true and widespread flourishing, a renaissance, of the kind fully supporting and enabling the capabilities for women and for monastic women in Buddhism to practice excellently, teach widely, and to thrive in the Sāsana with abundant shining leaders and exemplars. Monasteries and institutes for a high level of excellence in training, study and practice of bhikkhunis are just beginning to be founded in Sri Lanka, and have yet to be founded in the majority of the countries of revival: India, Thailand, Indonesia, Australia, USA, Europe. But we must be clear, it is the purpose of Buddhism to offer the best opportunity in the world for such full enablement

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<sup>120</sup> Thanks to the support of Bhikṣuṇī Dharma Master Heng-ching 釋恆清, it's been possible to locate and confirm a primary source reference to bhikṣuṇīs at Nālandā. This is the record of the early 7th century Korean Silla 新羅 Dynasty bhikṣu Hye-ryun 慧輪 who travelled to Nalanda as his bhikṣu master Hyeon-jo 玄照 as his attendant at p0005a 15-17 below. He observed bhikṣuṇīs at Nalanda as highlighted at p0006a 10(05). The text, 《大唐西域求法高僧傳》 or Biographies of the Venerable Monks of the Great Tang Dynasty Who Studied Buddhist Classics in the Western Regions by Bhikṣu Yijing (traditional Chinese: 義淨; simplified Chinese: 义净; pinyin: Yìjìng; Wade-Giles: I Ching), is T51 no. 2066 in the Taisho Tripiṭaka. It can be found and referenced on CBETA here: [http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2066\\_001.htm](http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2066_001.htm). Ven. Su Co Thich Nu Hanhtri has also mentioned a Vietnamese source with regards to Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs who travelled to Nālandā to study. Indian sources list further great women's monastic training and education centers in the India of that time of Buddhist florescence. In older Indian inscriptions, we also find reference to bhikṣuṇī Tripiṭaka masters, Dharma masters of sutra and Vinaya and *bhadanta*, master teachers.



through the Path of the Buddha's Teaching, in that "most fertile ground for cultivation,"<sup>121</sup> the Sangha.

In the *Sangha Sobhana Gāthā*, "Verse Illuminating and Adorning the Sangha," the Buddha speaks of householder disciples of both genders of great trust, faith and confidence; of bhikkhu disciples with luminary *sīla*—moral virtue and ethics; and of bhikkhunī disciples "who are deeply studied, highly-learned and brilliant teachers of wide knowledge"—*bahussuta*—as illuminating the Sāsana and the Sangha.

***Sangha Sobhana Gāthā***  
for the Long Life of the Sāsana  
& the Illumination and Beauty of the Sangha

*Bhikkhu ca sīlasampanno,  
bhikkhunī ca bahussutā,  
upāsako ca yo saddho,  
yā ca saddhā upāsikā,  
ete kho saṅghaṃ sobhenti,  
ete hi saṅghasobhanā.*

A bhikkhu consummate in moral virtue,  
A bhikkhunī who is widely learned,  
A male lay disciple who has faith,  
And a confident female lay disciple,  
These illuminate the Sangha,  
These are the beautifiers of the Sangha.

- the Buddha,  
*Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*  
(AN 4.7 at A II 8,22)

比丘持淨戒,  
比丘尼多聞,  
優婆塞淨信,  
優婆夷亦然。

- the Buddha,  
*Connected Discourses of the Buddha*  
(SĀ 873 at T II 220c11)

With deep gratitude to my own late most venerable preceptor Ven. Dr. Havanpola Ratanasāra, to those greatly dedicated beings of wide-reaching

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<sup>121</sup> *Sangho sukhetta bhyati khetta sannito...vandāmi saṅghaṃ aham ādarena taṃ*—"the Sangha, which is the most fertile ground for cultivation...devotedly indeed, that Sangha I revere." Morning Chanting, Thailand. I.e., <http://www.vimokkha.com/mchanting.htm>.

knowledge and action: Bhante Piyananda, Bhante Gunaratana and my own most venerable bhikkhunī mentor Ven. Dr. Myeong Seong Sunim—as to all of the most venerable teachers mentioned here and to all greatly inspiring, encouraging and enabling teachers—my deep reverence, respect and gratitude. As Bhante Ratanasāra said on the occasion of the first Sāmaṇerī Pabbajjā at the Bhavana Society Forest Monastery, “we should be exemplary,” illuminating both our own hearts and illuminating the Sāsana.

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## Photo credits

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