

The Role of Bhikkhunī Saṅgha in Taiwan Buddhism

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In early Buddhism it is recorded an encounter between the enlightened nun Somā and Māra. In response to Mara, Soma states that the femininity has nothing to do with the spiritual achievement. What are implications for today that we can learn from this statement? In the present paper, I will attempt to illustrate the validity of Soma Therī's insight on femininity based on the Bhikkhunī order in Taiwan. In the present paper, to understand the role of bhikkhunī saṅgha in Taiwan Buddhism, First, I will investigate the first the history of Taiwan Buddhism and its growth with the arrival monks from Mainland China in 1940s. This helps to understand the background which helped the Taiwan nuns to turn themselves as leading persons in the Buddhist world. The formal history of Taiwan Buddhism is quite short. Yet its achievements are very significant. The monks migrated from China to Taiwan transformed the Taiwan Buddhism into 'humanity oriented movement (ren-jian fo-jiau). With the initiation of Master Tai Xu (1890-1947) in China, Master Yun Shun (1906-2005) and Master Hsing Yun (1927) promoted the humanistic Buddhism ideologically and practically in Taiwan. The humanistic Buddhism emphasizes the need of building a better society on the earth where we are living in this movement and without being concerned only with work for the nextworld. The step in the study is to examine two prominent bhikkhunīs and their contribution to Taiwan Buddhism. Here I select two nuns Master Cheng Yen (1937) and Master Hui Wan (1913-2006). Being a student of Master Yun Shun, Venerable Cheng Yen initiated the Compassionate Relief Foundation (Tzuji Gong de hui) in 1966. At the moment, Tzu Chi Foundation functions as a global organization spreading all over five continents. The Tzu ji foundation covers the several areas of social activities, health sector, education, environmental protection and most important section is international disaster relief activities. The second important figure, Venerable Hui Wan founded Huaifan Buddhist University. Her roles as an educationist embodies the role of Taiwanese nuns are active as teachers. The promotion of Buddhist studies is carried out by hosting both local and foreign scholars and students. In addition to these two figures, there are several female monasteries and education centres run by nuns. The contribution of nuns in Taiwan society can be seen in several areas, culture, education, environment and social services. By the moment, Taiwan nuns are becoming the leading persons for bhikkhunī saṅgha in all three Buddhist traditions, Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayāna. In the present paper, I will attempt to trace the progressive contribution of nun community in Taiwan, into the roots of Buddhism, where it says when the person is equipped with proper training gained through discipline both physical and