

Journal of Buddhist Ethics

ISSN 1076-9005

<http://blogs.dickinson.edu/buddhistethics/>

Volume 18, 2011

A Cross-Tradition Exchange Between Taiwan and Sri Lanka

Wei-Yi Cheng
Hsuan Chuang University

Copyright Notice: Digital copies of this work may be made and distributed provided no change is made and no alteration of a single copy for private study, requires the written permission of the author. All enquiries to: editor@buddhistethics.org

A Cross-Tradition Exchange Between Taiwan and Sri Lanka

Wei-Yi Cheng¹

Abstract

This paper uses as an example an alms-offering ceremony that took place on October 5, 2010 to illustrate cross-tradition exchanges between Asian Buddhists of different geographic locations. This ceremony had been intended to give alms to all of the *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka and was thus itself noteworthy. However, the attention of this paper is on the two main players behind this ceremony. One is a Sri Lankan monk who has been a long term Theravāda missionary in Mahāyāna Taiwan, and the other is a Taiwanese nunnery who has not limited its works to Taiwan. This paper wishes to shed light on cross-tradition exchange among Asian Buddhists.

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Hsuan Chuang University, Taiwan. Email: chengw@hcu.edu.tw

On October 4, 2010 around 7 p.m. led by a police escort, the three head nuns of a Taiwanese *bhikkhunī sangha*, Daxingshan Nunnery, and forty of their Taiwanese lay devotees arrived at Manelwatta Temple in Bollegala, Sri Lanka. A cheerful senior monk of Manelwatta Temple, B. Chandima, greeted them. As I held up my camera to catch a picture, I was immediately warned by the nuns' lay assistant, "Don't. The masters like to keep a low profile." Low profile they might like to keep, but what they were about to do was noteworthy in Sri Lankan Buddhist history—they were to sponsor the first alms-offering ceremony that was designated for all of the *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka.

This essay is about this ceremony and the stories behind it. Buddhist traditions in Asia are often associated with geography; e.g., the Theravāda tradition is usually associated with Southeast Asia and the Mahāyāna tradition with East Asia. Cross-tradition exchanges are seldom noticed, particularly in the Western academia where it seems to be assumed that pluralistic Buddhist practices can only be found in the West because Asians, bounded by their historical traditions, do not interact with Buddhists from a different tradition. The first all- Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* alms-offering ceremony proves this assumption disputable, for this event involves players from different Buddhist traditions.

The purpose of this essay is not only to document this cross-tradition event but also to shed light on cross-tradition Buddhist exchanges across Asia. I will give an ethnographic description of the alms-offering ceremony, followed by the discussion on the two main players in the event, the Sri Lankan monk B. Chandima and Daxingshan Nunnery of Taiwan. But I will begin with a brief introduction to the issue of *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka in order to highlight the noteworthiness of the event itself.

***Bhikkhunī* Ordination**

“*Bhikkhunī*” refers to a fully-ordained Buddhist nun. The Buddhist tradition believes that the first *bhikkhunī* was the Buddha’s aunt Mahā-Pajāpatī Gōtamī, who, along with a large number of Sākyan women, entered the Buddhist monastic order (Wijayaratna 9-19). The Sinhala chronicle *Mahāvamsa* states that Buddhism was transmitted to Sri Lanka by King Aśoka’s son, the elder Mahinda, around the Third century B.C.E. When five hundred Sinhala women, led by Queen Anulā, asked to enter the *sangha*, the elder Mahinda replies:

It is not allowed (to us), O great king, to bestow the *pabbajjā* [lower ordination] on women. But in Pataliputta there lives a nun, my younger sister, known by the name Samghamittā. She, who is ripe in experience, shall come hither bringing with her the southern branch of the great Bodhi-tree of the king of *samanas*, O king of men, and (bringing) also *bhikkhunīs* renowned (for holiness); to this end send a message to the king my father. When this *therī* is here she will confer the *pabbajjā* upon these women. (Geiger 98)

The statement above confirms the need for an existing *bhikkhunī sangha* to transmit *bhikkhunī* ordination. Wijayaratna summarizes factors involved in *bhikkhunī* ordination as the following:

- (1) Ordination in the [*bhikkhunī sangha*] had to be conferred by “both sides of the Community” [i.e. by both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī sangha*];
- (2) the candidate was presented to the assembled [*bhikkhunī sangha*] by a competent nun;
- (3) each candidate came to the [*sangha*] only through the sponsorship of a nun of some standing. (Wijayaratna 36)

Accordingly, the *bhikkhunī* ordination requires the participation of *bhikkhunīs*. The problem arises when a *bhikkhunī sangha* is absent to meet the necessary requirements.

Historical and archeological evidence reveals that the *bhikkhunī sangha* flourished in Sri Lanka until around the Eleventh century C.E. The cause for the demise of *bhikkhunī sangha* is unclear (Devendra 73-75). An alternative Buddhist nuns' order (*dasasil mātā*; or "Ten Precept Mother") was created in Sri Lanka during the Buddhist Revival Movement of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Since the mid-1980s, efforts have been made to establish a *bhikkhunī sangha* in countries where it currently is absent (Kawanami 226-229). However, strong objections to the (re)establishment of the *bhikkhunī sangha* were made in Therāvada countries. Karma Lekshe Tsomo recalls what it was like when the third Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) conference was held in Colombo in 1993:

Although the Ministry for Buddhist Affairs had warned the organizers against discussing the issue of [*bhikkhunī*] ordination, the topic could not be suppressed. A significant number of Sri Lankan women are determined to reestablish the [*bhikkhunī*] *Sangha* in Sri Lanka, not only to recover a lost part of their Buddhist heritage but also to affirm their personal heritage as women. (2)

Kawanami also notes that *bhikkhunī* ordination in Myanmar might mean an actual jail term for its organizers (232-234). Given the government's strong objection, a large scale of alms-offering ceremony for Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* would not have been imaginable in 1993. This makes the alms-offering ceremony on October 5, 2010 especially significant, for it hints at the return of the *bhikkhunī sangha* to Sri Lanka.

The Ceremony²

I learned about the event in August 2010 when devotees in monk B. Chandima's temple in Taiwan (see next section) discussed preparations for the upcoming alms-offering ceremony. They were excited because they understood it to be a historical event for Sri Lanka. They believed that all *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka would be invited to participate in the ceremony.

After about three months of preparation, the ceremony officially began on October 4, 2010, when fifteen Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* started to conduct an overnight *pirit* ceremony at Manelwatta Temple. *Pirit* (in Sinhala), or *paritta* in Palī, means "protection"; chanting *pirit* suttas for protection, security, prosperity, etc. is a common ritual in Sri Lanka (Wickremeratne 167-177). In this case, the fifteen *bhikkhunīs* were invited to chant *pirit* for the opening of a new building at the temple ground.

As the *bhikkhunīs* commenced chanting *pirit*, a Sinhala woman from south of the island whispered to my ear, "It's the first time I see *bhikkhunīs* doing *pirit*." I was surprised because I had witnessed *pirit* chanting conducted by *bhikkhunīs* as far back as 2002. This discrepancy shows that religious service by *bhikkhunīs* was perhaps still not an island-wide phenomenon by 2010.

The *pirit* service was said to finish at 5 a.m. the next morning. Even though it was late, hundreds of volunteers could still be seen on the temple grounds preparing for the next day's alms-offering ceremony. The head monk of Manelwatta Temple, Pallewela Sarada, had been up since the early morning and was still busy arranging the venue at around midnight. Several Sinhala volunteers claimed that they intended to keep

² Information in this section is from my fieldwork notes at Manelwatta Temple, Bollegala on October 4 and 5, 2010.

on working throughout the night. The public kitchen at Manelwatta Temple was still preparing food for volunteers. Earlier that day, a monk informant told me that perhaps two thousand lay volunteers were involved.

White marquees were set up around the temple ground and a temporary outdoor Buddha shrine was raised. By 6 a.m. householders in white outfits were already arriving, joining the lay volunteers who had worked throughout the night and had not left the temple. Rumors were flying around that the President and the First Lady, as well as the supreme Mahānāyakas (chiefs monks of the monastic lineages; see Gard 171-172), would attend the ceremony. Uniformed police and soldiers with rifles were stationed around the temple ground. The three head nuns and forty Taiwanese devotees of Daxingshan Nunnery arrived shortly before 9 a.m. from the hotel where they lodged. The head nuns were invited to rest inside the temple while the lay devotees rested outside.

According to a number of informants who were involved in the ceremony preparation, sixty-five buses were hired to transport Sri Lankan nuns and other nuns arrived by their own means. Several monk informants told me that initially, they planned to invite a total of 5,500 Buddhist nuns for the alms-offering ceremony, which would include all of the *bhikkhunīs* and *sāmanerīs* (nun novices) in Sri Lanka as well as prominent *dasa sil mātās* (ten-precepts nuns). The organizer received only about 2,200 confirmations, but others came and in the end approximately 2,900 nuns attended the ceremony. Fortunately, the organizer prepared 3,000 sets of alms, each of which included, in addition to lunch, two pieces of robes, two *Tipitaka* quotation books, a Buddhist prayer book (all three books were in Sinhala but printed in Taiwan), a begging

bowl and a water filter.³ All expenses were provided by Daxingshan Nunnery.

At 10:17 a.m., the Buddhist nuns, led by a police escort, *perahera* (traditional drummer procession; see Wickremeratne 108-110) and a Buddha relic wrapped in bright yellow cloth and carried by a man on the top of his head could be seen at the entrance of Manelwatta Temple. The nuns formed two rows. One consisted of *bhikkhunīs* and *sāmanerīs*; they were led into the main temple ground. The other row of nuns consisted of *dasa sil mātās*; they were led into the opposite side of the main temple ground, which had been a residential area for a number of foreign nuns (from Myanmar and India) studying in Sri Lanka. Taiwanese devotees of Daxingshan Nunnery waiting at the gate gave the entering Sri Lankan nuns a lunch pack on their begging bowls. Around 11:10 a.m., when all the Sri Lankan nuns appeared to have all been seated, some Sri Lankan monks and the three Taiwanese nuns were led out of the temple to seats in the temporary outdoor Buddha shrine. They sat near the shrine in three rows of seats covered in white cloth. The monks sat in the front two rows and the senior Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* set in the third row, behind the monks. The three Taiwanese nuns sat in the last table of the first row of monks; their table was respectfully set apart from that of monks. The Sri Lankan monks present included two *Mahānayakas*: Davuldena Gnanissara (Amarapura Mahānayaka) and Weweldeniyē Medhalankara (Ramanna Mahānayaka). The presence of *Mahānayakas* was significant because it indicated that the *bhikkhunī sangha* had been accepted by certain segments of Buddhist establishment in Sri Lanka.

A Sri Lankan monk started the prayer chanting with *ti sarana* (taking refuge in the triple gems) and *pañca-sīlā* (observing the basic five Buddhist precepts). This was followed by speeches from two monks and

³For a photo, see <http://picasaweb.google.com/theravada.samadhi/FirstAllSriLankanBhikkhuniDana#5524740012276636466> (accessed on 28 February 2011).

the head nun of Daxingshan Nunnery. Her speech was brief, in Taiwanese dialect, and read from script. It seemed that she was not entirely aware of the on-going events, for despite of the non-attendance of the First Lady Shiranthi Rajapakse, the head nun still addressed the First Lady in her speech. Her speech mentioned nothing about the significance of the alms-offering ceremony: she merely wished world peace. The Taiwanese devotees and then Sri Lankan devotees proceeded to offer food to the nuns and monks even though some nuns had received lunch packs on their entering to the temple. While the monks and nuns ate, the Taiwanese nuns and devotees entered the temple for their lunch. Sri Lankan devotees were given lunch packs and ate outside. Throughout the lunch, a music CD brought by Daxingshan Nunnery played through the loud speaker. The music, *Jiuhuashan Jiushi Shifu Zan*, (“Praises to Savior Master of Daxingshan Nunnery”) was not a common Buddhist music or chanting of Buddha names that are popular in contemporary Taiwan, but a series of chanting that praises the founding nun of Daxingshan Nunnery (details later). After the lunch, the usual prayer for the transference of merit was chanted and the ceremony concluded around 2 p.m.

I talked with some of the junior monks and Sri Lankan lay devotees later that afternoon. They appeared to be satisfied with the outcome. This, according to them, was the first attempt in contemporary Sri Lanka to host an alms-offering ceremony for all *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka. Media coverage of the ceremony would mean that the word “*bhikkhunī*” was no longer a taboo in Sri Lanka and would perhaps help to legitimize the *bhikkhunī sangha* in the minds of the Sri Lankan populace. It did not, however, signal gender equalitarianism. The Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* and even the donor nuns of Daxingshan Nunnery were set behind the monks in the ceremony. Also, although the head nun of Daxingshan Nunnery was given a chance to speak at the ceremony, no representative of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* was invited to speak. A Taiwanese laywoman who was involved in the negotiation between Daxingshan Nunnery and Sri Lan-

kan organizer apologized to the head nun about the arrangement afterwards. The head nun replied, according to the laywoman, “That’s okay. It’s the same in Taiwan. We’re used to it.” Her reply indicates that the patriarchal hegemony has transcends the boundaries of Buddhist traditions and affected what could-have-been a show of gender equalitarian event.

In the next section, I will give a brief introduction to the monk who set up the connection between Daxingshan Nunnery and this alms-offering ceremony, monk Bodagama Chandima.

Monk Bodagama Chandima

“Venerable Dr. Bodagama Chandima Thero,” as he was commonly known in Sri Lankan media⁴, or “Master Qiang” as he was fondly and reverently nicknamed by his Taiwanese devotees, was born in Matara District in Southern Sri Lanka in 1957. According to a story that he related later, he was inspired to enter *sangha* at the age of eleven after witnessing the rainy retreat of three monks that took place in his aunt’s house. He got his wish and went on a series of educational experiences typical to post-Independence Sri Lankan monks: *pirivena* (Buddhist monastic school) education at the age of 13, Buddhasravaka-Dharmapithaya University for his B.A. degree and his M.A. degree in Buddhist Philosophy from Peradeniya University in 1986. Upon his graduation, Chandima began to have the opportunity to travel abroad, first to Thailand for meditation training and then to Malaysia where he met the well-known Buddhist missionary *bhikkhu* K. Sri Dhammananda (1919-2006):

⁴ For example, see “Sri Lanka President visits Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar,” *Colombo Page: Sri Lanka internet newspaper*, June 16, 2009: http://www.colombopage.com/archive_091/Jun1245149148CH.html (accessed on 1 December 2009).

I had intended to [visit Malaysia] for two weeks and then returned to Sri Lanka. But then Dhammananda Thero learnt that I studied Pāli at Peradeniya University, so he asked me to do some book-editing He was working on the Dammapala and I helped to edit the Pāli I ended up staying for one year!⁵

Chandima's time with K. Sri Dhammananda seems to be a key turning-point in his career. K. Sri Dhammananda spent much of his life in Malaysia as a Theravāda Buddhist missionary. His aim of propagating Theravāda Buddhism was evident from the web page of the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia with which he was affiliated: "In 1961, Venerable K. Sri Dhammananda, the abbot of the Brickfields Buddhist Maha Vihara, saw the need to establish a society to bring forth the message of the Buddha to the masses."⁶ It seems that Chandima was inspired by K. Sri Dhammananda's Buddhist missionary zeal:

You see, he was such an old man, but for Dhamma propagation, he would give lecture at a university every Friday. Every Friday he [lectured] at a university. And you see, many senior monks would travel with disciples when they go aboard to give Dhamma talk. But not the Thero. He took one bag and then just went He was very childlike. He liked to joke with other people. He never thought about where should I sit and where should I stand. No, he did not care those things. He traveled around the world by

⁵ For more, see <http://www.ksridhammananda.com> (accessed on 2 November 2009). Interviewed on February 10, 2010. The interview was in Mandarin and my translation to English.

⁶ http://www.bmsm.org.my/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52&Itemid=53 (accessed on 9 February 2010).

himself, without any attendant He was full of compassion. We all learnt from the Thero.⁷

In 1990, Chandima was told to go to Taiwan to learn Chinese for the purpose of returning to Malaysia to proselytize Theravāda Buddhism among the Chinese population there. This intended short-stay in Taiwan turned out to be a long term affair. The key person for this change of plan was a devoted Buddhist, whom I code “Brother Jian.”⁸ Brother Jian not only sponsored Chandima’s tuition and living expenses but also arranged for Chandima to hold classes at a Buddhist center in Taipei (the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation):

One day, a householder called me and said that a Dharma Master is coming but he has no place to live I said, “Okay, we will help him” So the chairperson arranged him to stay at a Buddhist center where he became the resident monk We Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation invited him to teach Therāvada Dhammapala and meditation.

Whether Chandima’s propagation of Theravāda Buddhism met any resistance from local Buddhists is an intriguing question. Both he and his earlier supporters denied ever experiencing overt resistance. For example, Brother Jian said:

[Tradition affiliation] doesn’t matter actually our Foundation belongs to everyone. You see, at our meditation center, we have all [traditions]. Every tradition. It doesn’t matter if it were Mahāyāna, Indian, Tibetan.

⁷ Interviewed on February 10, 2010. My translation to English. All quotations from Chandima are from interviews on January 25, 2010 and February 10, 2010.

⁸ In Buddhist settings in Taiwan, laywomen are usually referred to as “Dharma sister” and laymen as “Dharma brother.” My coding the interviewees as “sister” and “brother” is only to imply their gender; it does not suggest that they might be monastics.

Chandima also claimed, “I came here and every there was nice to me ... They all treated me well.” Hence, if there were any concerns over Chandima’s “‘Theravādizing’ local systems of belief and practice” (Kemper 41) among non-Theravāda Buddhists in Taiwan, it was not openly expressed.

Even though Buddhism in Taiwan is largely from the Chinese tradition, Taiwan has witnessed the active arrival of different Buddhist traditions in recent years. Tibetan Buddhism is the most noticed and appears to be growing at a rapid pace in Taiwan (Yao). Theravāda Buddhism has been less noticed by academia but is equally active. Although I could not find any academic study on the development of Theravāda Buddhism in Taiwan, I did find an online article (Ratana) suggesting that Theravāda Buddhism first appeared in Taiwan in the 1960s and mentioning that the author of the popular book, *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpola Rahula (1907–1997), visited Taiwan in 1965. When I asked my Taiwanese Buddhist friends about the emergence of Theravāda Buddhism in Taiwan, all of them pointed to the 1990s with the publication of several translated Theravāda mediation books. Best known are Thai *bhikkhu* Buddhadasa’s books that were translated and published during the 1990s. In other words, when Chandima came to Taiwan in 1990, Theravāda Buddhism was still a relatively unknown tradition in Taiwan. His works in Taiwan have built a bridge between Theravāda tradition and Chinese tradition. The *bhikkhunī* alms-offering ceremony on October 5, 2010 was as an outcome of this exchange.

Daxingshan Nunnery

Taiwan was mentioned in the re-establishing *bhikkhunī sangha* movement in Sri Lanka from fairly earlier on, partly because of Taiwan’s prosperous and active *bhikkhunī sangha*. Writes Buddhist feminist scholar Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “in all of East Asia, no place can boast a resurgence

of Buddhism equal to that of Taiwan, nor a [*bhikkhunī sangha*] as strong” (19).

But more importantly, the Chinese *bhikkhunī sangha* traces its origin to Sri Lanka. A Chinese hagiography records that the *bhikkhunī sangha* was transmitted from Sri Lanka to China in 433 C.E. (Tsai 53-54). This historical connection has led some Buddhist feminists to suggest that receiving the *bhikkhunī* ordination from the Chinese *bhikkhunī sangha* would be “like accepting back the great gift that was given in earlier times” (Wijayasundara 84) and should help to legitimize Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī sangha* in the minds of the Sri Lankan populace. Given this background, one might expect the Taiwanese nunnery that sponsored the first all Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* alms-offering ceremony would be either feminist-oriented or at least interested in the international *bhikkhunī* movement. On the contrary, the Taiwan *bhikkhunī sangha* involved in this ceremony does not appear to be interested in nor even aware of the international *bhikkhunī* movement. I suspect this because in early 2011, a lay volunteer involved in this ceremony asked me for information on the situation of Buddhist nuns in contemporary Sri Lanka. “I want to show the information to the masters,” she told me. This suggests that nuns at Daxingshan Nunnery had not been well informed about the situation of *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka. Their interest in sponsoring the alms-offering ceremony for *bhikkhunīs* is said, according to some lay devotees whom I chatted with, to have sprouted from their sympathy for Theravāda nuns. I was told that during the nuns’ charity works in Theravāda countries, they witnessed the improvised situation of Theravāda Buddhist nuns. As nuns themselves, they wished to help their sisters elsewhere. Because my requests to interview nuns of Daxingshan Nunnery were declined, it is difficult to know for certain about their motives behind this alms-offering ceremony.

To my knowledge, Daxingshan Nunnery has been actively engaged in oversea charity works in recent years. Most relevant to this paper is Daxingshan Nunnery's works in Myanmar. After the cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar in May 2008, monk B. Chandima began a reconstruction project that aimed to build 1,000 houses for displaced victims of the cyclone. Donors of this reconstruction project are mainly from Taiwan but also from other Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore and constituted of different religious groups (including non-Buddhist organizations). Eventually, according to the Theravada Samadhi Education Association, 736 wooden houses were built in the Kunyangan area, 320 of them financed by Daxingshan Nunnery. According to my informants, it was during those visits to Myanmar that they noticed the impoverished situation of nuns and hence rose "the desire" to help Theravāda Buddhist nuns. Because of the prior cooperation with monk B. Chandima, Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* became their first choice to give alms.

Jiuhuasahn Daxingshan Nunnery (shortened as "Daxingshan Nunnery" in this paper), is located in remote Sanyi township, Miaoli County of central Taiwan. Its fame has spread far and wide despite its avoidance of publicity. Unlike many Buddhist temples in Taiwan, one cannot find introductory brochures at Daxingshan Nunnery nor does Daxingshan Nunnery have an official website to advertise itself. My requests to interview nuns or devotees of Daxingshan Nunnery were declined on the ground that they do not wish to "gain fame." In academia, Daxingshan Nunnery largely goes unnoticed; Li Yuchen's works appear to be the only academic discourse on Daxingshan Nunnery thus far. But all of my Taiwanese Buddhist friends have heard of Daxingshan Nunnery; they know it mostly for the rumored magic power of its founding nun, Fuhui. In Taiwan, Fuhui is often referred to as "the nameless *bhikkhuni*" (*wuming biqiuni*, c. 1930-1985).

Despite Daxingshan Nunnery's fame, little is known about its founder nun Fuhui. According to Li, nun Fuhui was born in Yuanli township, Miaoli County. Her natal family name was Chen and might have been from a well-to-do family. The exact year of her birth and educational achievement is unclear. She was probably born in 1930 or 1931 and probably had attended high school. Some of Li's informants hinted that she had an unhappy marriage and after the death of her husband, she left home to pursue spiritual practice. The age and year of her leaving home to pursue "spiritual practice" is wrapped in mystery. Li speculates that the duration of her "spiritual practice" may have been less than a year. She later reappeared in Yuanli township as a Buddhist nun with the monastic name "Fuhui". The irony is that while Daxingshan Nunnery seeks to support the *bhikkhunī sangha* in Sri Lanka, the monastic lineage of nun Fuhui herself is obscure. Li cites an article by writer Chen Huijian, who had an audience with Fuhui in 1983, and suggests that Fuhui's monastic ordination is untraceable and no one is certain of Fuhui's tonsure master and her Dhamma lineage (65-67).

Important to note is that Daxingshan Nunnery's claim of refusing monetary donations or engaging in business matters is in accordance with Fuhui's ascetic teachings. After the death of Fuhui, her eleven disciples split up into two groups: one moved to Sanyi township of Miaoli County and the other moved to Tongluo township of Miaoli County. They both carry the name "Jiuhuashan Daxingshan Nunnery." The one engaging in alms-offering for Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* is from Sanyi township. The nun I chatted with during my February 2011 trip to Daxingshan Nunnery in Sanyi township criticized the other's dealings in business matter. She claimed that in the Sanyi branch, devotees provided all the living necessities. Her words rang some truth, for one cannot find any donation box at Daxingshan Nunnery. But when I inquired how they pay the electricity and running water, she admitted that there is a tea garden in which the nuns and devotees work in order to generate necessary

monetary income. In Borchert's recent paper, he expresses his astonishment upon witnessing Theravāda monks performing physical labor, for it is against monastic ideal and the Vinaya for Buddhist monastics to engage in labor works. On the other hand, it has long become acceptable for Chinese Buddhist monastics to engage in labor work (Liu; Ornatowski, 220-221). Hence, rather than viewing the labor work performed by nuns of Daxingshan Nunnery as a violation to the *Vinaya*, it is viewed by their devotees as a virtue of self-reliance. My informants claimed that money for the alms-offering ceremony for Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* came entirely from lay devotees, especially one layman with last name "Zheng." It was after the nuns expressing their wish to give alms to Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*, lay devotees made donations to make the October 5, 2010 alms-offering ceremony a reality.

Summary

This essay sets out to describe an event (the first alms-offering ceremony for all Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*) that disassociates Buddhist traditions with geography. On one side of the exchange was Taiwanese Daxingshan Nunnery, an unlikely player in re-establishing the *bhikkhunī sangha* movement in Sri Lanka. By all appearances, Daxingshan Nunnery seems to be oblivious of Buddhist feminism and less than eager to expand its sect. Note that the main tongue spoken at Daxingshan Nunnery is Taiwanese dialect rather than the official language, Mandarin, that is more widely spoken in Taiwan. This implies that Daxingshan Nunnery has made little effort to attract a broader spectrum of Taiwanese Buddhists. One thus doubts whether Daxingshan Nunnery would be interested in extending its influence to Sri Lanka. On the other side of the exchange is the Sri Lankan monk B. Chandima who has come to Taiwan with the intention of missionizing Theravāda Buddhism. His very work of "Theravādaizing" Taiwanese Buddhism can be seen as a form of ex-

change, not to mention his setting up the bridge between Daxingshan Nunnery and Sri Lankan nuns.

Although Taiwanese Daxingshan Nunnery financed the ceremony, the whole procedure was designed and managed by Manelwatta Temple, the associated temple of monk B. Chandima. As such, it is not surprising to find that the alms-offering procedure was conducted mostly in accordance with the Sri Lankan tradition (a notable exception was the playing of the tape brought by Daxingshan Nunnery). This ceremony shows that Asian Buddhists are not necessarily bounded by the geography or by the history of their traditions. Just as Sri Lankan monk B. Chandima may preach Theravāda Buddhism in Taiwan, Taiwanese Buddhists may go to Sri Lanka to participate in Theravāda ritual.

Due to the scope of this paper, I have omitted many notable issues. For example, the gender politics involved in the ceremony is an intriguing one. While the re-establishing *bhikkhunī sangha* movement began as a Buddhist feminist movement, the first alms-offering ceremony for all Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* turned out to be a patriarchal manifestation. How much this patriarchal manifestation reduces the empowerment of Buddhist women is worthy of investigation. Another issue concerns monetary influence in Buddhist exchange. It has been complained (for example, by Goonatilake) that the wealthier foreign donors often, intentionally or unintentionally, alter the cultural landscape of Sri Lanka. It therefore remains a contentious issue to see how the financial assistance of Daxingshan Nunnery might change the Buddhist landscape in Sri Lanka.

References

Bartholomeusz, Tessa. *Women under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka*. New York & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Borchert, Thomas. "Monastic Labor: Thinking About the Work of Monks in Contemporary Theravada Communities," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 1 (2011), 162-92.

Chen, Huijian, "Wuming biqiuni suifanglu,;" <http://book.bfn.org/books2/1249.htm> (accessed 17 April 2011).

Devendra, Kusuma. "The Dasasil Nun: A Study of Women's Buddhist Religious Movement in Sri Lanka with an Outline of Its Historical Antecedents." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Sri Jayawardenapura, 1987.

Gard, Richard A. *Buddhism*. New York: George Braziller, 1961.

Geiger, Wilhelm (trans.). *The Mahavamsa*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2003.

Goonatilake, Susantha. *Recolonisation: Foreign Funded Ngos in Sri Lanka*. New Delhi & Thousand Oaks & London: SAGE Publications, 2006.

Kawanami, Hiroko. "The Bhikkhuni Ordination Debate: Global Aspirations, Local Concerns, with Special Emphasis on the Views of the Monastic Community in Burma," *Buddhist Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2007), 226-44.

Li, Yu-chen. "Crafting Women's Religious Experience in a Patrilineal Society: Taiwanese Buddhist Nuns in Action (1945--1999)." Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 2000.

———. "Paihuai Guanyin Yu Dicang Zhijian- Taiwan Jiuhuashan Fuhui Biqiuni Chogbai." In *Minjian Fojiang Yanjiu*, edited by Tan Weilun, 63-93. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2007.

Liu, Xiao-ping. "Baizhang Commandments and the Economic Changes of Buddhism Temples in Tang Dynasty," *Jiangxi Shehui Kexue*, no. 2 (2009), 127 -31.

Ornatowski, Gregory K. "Continuity and Change in the Economic Ethics of Buddhism—Evidence from the History of Buddhism in India, China and Japan," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*, 3 (1996), 187-229.

Ratana, Ven. "Taiwan Nanchuan Fojiao De Fajhan," <http://longquanzs.org/articledetail.php?id=4855> (accessed on 12 February 2010).

Tsai, Kathryn Ann (trans.). *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries*. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995.

Tsomo, Karma Lekshe. "Mahaprajapati's Legacy: The Buddhist Women's Movement." In *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 1-44. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Wickremeratne, Swarna. *Buddha in Sri Lanka: Remembered Yesterdays*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Wijayaratna, Mohan. *Buddhist Nuns: The Birth and Development of Women's Monastic Order*. Colombo: Wisdom, 2001.

Wijayasundara, Senarat. "Restoring the Order of Nuns to the Theravadin Tradition." In *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, 79-87. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.

Yao, Lixian, *Cangchuan Fojiao zai Taiwan*. Taipei: Dongda, 2007.