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## Editorial

*Richard Gombrich*

“Taiwan has the highest number of Buddhist nuns in the world and also a greater proportion relative to monks, a situation in monastic Buddhism unlike any other on earth.”<sup>1</sup> “[I]t is estimated that there are around 15,000 nuns active in Taiwan at present.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet, a hundred years ago there was not a single ordained Buddhist nun in Taiwan. How did the nuns’ movement there begin?

Let me briefly show the wide historical significance of this question. The largest body of nuns in Taiwan for the past half century has been at Fo Guang Shan in southern Taiwan, a huge monastery for both sexes founded by the Master Xingyun in the 1950s. Voramai Kabilsingh, the first Thai woman to receive full ordination, was ordained there in 1970. Her daughter, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, was later ordained in Sri Lanka in 2003 as Bhikkhunī Dhammānanda, and has been a foremost proponent of religious rights for Buddhist women.

In 1988 Xingyun founded Xilai Monastery, “the largest Buddhist temple in the Western world”, in a suburb of Los Angeles, and “decided to offer the Chinese ordination rite to Theravada as well as Tibetan nuns so that they might eventually establish Fo Guang Shan ordination lineages in their own countries”.<sup>3</sup> In 1998 he held a huge ordination ceremony for both monks and nuns from all the major Buddhist traditions in Bodh Gaya.<sup>4</sup>

To learn about the antecedents to these developments, read our article by Yu-Shuang Yao. It turns out that during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan a Rinza

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<sup>1</sup> Elise Anne DeVido, *Taiwan's Buddhist Nuns*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2010, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Sarah LeVine and David N. Gellner, *Rebuilding Buddhism: the Theravada Movement in Twentieth-Century Nepal*, Cambridge Mass. and London, Harvard University Press, 2005, p.184.

<sup>4</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp.189-193.

Zen monk called Gisei Higashiumi had learnt Hokkien, the local form of Chinese, and in 1919 held a ceremony in southern Taiwan at which he ordained 84 monks and 79 nuns. He repeated these ordinations for over 20 years, and arranged for the nuns, in total perhaps several hundred, to be educated in Japan. An intriguing detail is that in 1917 the Chinese monk Tai Xu had held an ordination ceremony in the very same temple. He was later to become internationally famous as the founder of “Humanistic Buddhism”. In the 1917 ceremony he ordained only men; but it is intriguing to speculate that he may have influenced the large scale female ordination held only two years later.

I would also like to draw attention to the “supplement” to the *Journal*: “The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts” by the Ven Sujato and the Ven Brahmali. The authors asked my advice about where to publish it. As it is clearly too long for an article, but probably too short for a book, I asked their permission to publish it *hors de série* as a special supplement to our *Journal*. It is now on our main web site and is accessible without a subscription. I regard this as a very important contribution to Buddhist studies. In my view, anyone who reads it will hardly be able to sustain the scepticism about our knowledge of what the Buddha taught which has become so fashionable in academia. It deserves to command wide attention.

I deplored this scepticism in my editorial for vol.5, in the context of the next IABS conference, which will be held in Vienna this August, and I remarked on the absence of the words “Pāli” and “Theravāda” from the published schedule. Now that the detailed programme has been published, there is something else which I find odd. 35 panels and 25 sections are to meet, and the participants (speakers) at these meetings are listed as numbering 458 in all. That’s an average of between 7 and 8 participants per meeting; and that in turn means that very many meetings will involve fewer people than 7! What can be deduced from this fragmentation? I used to think, perhaps naïvely, that a conference was a meeting at which people conferred. The *OED* gives as meanings for “confer” “converse” and “consult”; Webster’s *Dictionary* hits the nail on the head with “compare and exchange ideas”. How much reaction can a speaker expect to their ideas from so small an audience?