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Buddhist Women and Female Buddhist Education in the South China Sea: A History of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institute

Ruo Lin

Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore, Kent Ridge 119077, Singapore; linruo@u.nus.edu

Abstract: This paper studies the history of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institute, the first and only modern Buddhist education institution for women in Singapore and Malaysia. This paper aims to explore a dynamic transregional Buddhist network constructed by nuns, vegetarian nuns, and laywomen, with a particular emphasis on the prominent female figures and religious women communities involved. Through an analysis of the movements and religious practices of the Buddhist women community, the author demonstrates the contributions of Buddhist women to the transmission of religious knowledge and modern experiences. It is this paper's intention that the micro-history of the case could contribute to restaging the women-centered Buddhist community in the narrative of "South China Sea Buddhism".

Keywords: Buddhist women; Singapore Buddhism; Buddhist education; female Buddhist Networks

1. Introduction

Responding to the call for a "gender critical shift", Kang (2016, p. 491) asserts the importance of incorporating women's experiences and gender politics into discussions of Chinese religion and modernity. In recent decades, the experiences and roles of female Buddhists in the Greater China region have garnered increasing scholarly attention. Analysis of female Buddhists during the Republic of China era sheds light on the intricate interplay between political and cultural gender narratives, modernization, and the revivalist movements within the Buddhist community, illuminating how these dynamics have influenced women's engagement in Buddhist education and publication (Yuan 2009; Su 2014). Furthermore, the rise of the Bhikkhuni community in post-war Taiwan has provided a unique opportunity to delve into the religious experiences and institutional identities of Buddhist women, including nuns and vegetarian nuns, within the localized context (Jiang 1996; Chern 2000; Li 2000, 2002, 2010). Despite the growing interest in the study of Buddhist women, female Buddhists in Southeast Asia have yet to receive adequate attention. The current discussions on Buddhist women in Singapore tend to focus on individuals, emphasizing their roles as committed Buddhist practitioners or passionate followers of reformist monks' dharma missions (Sheng Kai 2019; Hue 2020).

In his groundbreaking monograph, Jack Meng-Tat Chia (2020a, p. 6) introduces the term "South China Sea Buddhism" to describe the modern Chinese Buddhism that has emerged through the "transnational circulation of people, knowledge, and capital between China and Southeast Asia". Chia's research provides a glimpse into the sociohistorical interconnections of Mahayana Buddhist communities in Greater China and maritime Southeast Asia. However, the research largely follows the male-monk-centric perspective and the clergy-and-devotee dichotomy (Ashiwa and Wank 2005).

Buddhist women have also played "instrumental" roles in the globalization of modern Chinese Buddhism, as stated by Elise DeVido (2015), serving as "bridges" across various historical eras, Buddhist institutions, and geographical spaces. Drawing upon DeVido's insight on transregional networks of Buddhist women, Show Ying Ruo investigates



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the interactions between vegetarian nuns and “orthodox” Chinese Buddhist communities, demonstrating how the long-standing female religious traditions have been integrated into the transregional experience of Buddhist modernization (Show 2020a, 2020b, 2021). DeVido and Show’s research highlights the mobility and flexibility of Buddhist women, underscoring the need for more gender perspectives in the ongoing discussions of Chinese Buddhism across the South China Sea. Studies on women within the transnational Chinese Buddhist network are still insufficient. Further scholarly investigations are necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the interactions between diverse religious traditions and comparative analyses of female Buddhist communities across different regions.

This paper delves into the history of the Singapore Girls’ Buddhist Institute (*xinjiapo nuzi foxueyuan*, 新加坡女子佛學院, hereafter “SGBI”), the first and only female Buddhist seminary¹ in Singapore, which operated from 1962 to 1975. Building upon the discourse of “South China Sea Buddhism”, this paper diverges from a focus on prominent modernist monks and instead centers on the transnational movements of women with diverse religious backgrounds. By adopting a dual-gendered and religious perspective, this paper seeks to provide a historical interpretation of the establishment, transformation, and social networks of SGBI. Participating in Buddhist education is a symbol of Buddhist women’s entrance into the public sphere; it was also a powerful means of conveying women’s voices in the religious realm (Yuan 2009; Su 2014; Li 2022). The case of SGBI would also provide a good opportunity to explore the evolution and transformation of the Malaya Peninsula’s Buddhist women communities.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part provides a historical context of female Buddhist education in the modern era. It seeks to demonstrate how the historical trajectories of the Buddhist modernization movement and female Buddhist activism intersect with the development of female Buddhist seminaries in the Chinese periphery, particularly Hong Kong and Macau. The second section of this paper examines the founding and development of SGBI in response to the transformation of Humanistic Buddhism paradigms and religious women’s communities in Singapore. The final section focuses on the SGBI’s female leadership and investigates the transregional affiliation networks that emerged from the movement of nuns, lay Buddhist women, and vegetarian nuns.²

In summary, this study intends to reposition the women-centered Buddhist community within the narrative of “South China Sea Buddhism” and reframe the “Buddhist woman” in transregional landscapes.

2. Modern Female Buddhist Education from Wuchang to Hong Kong

2.1. The Rise of Female Buddhist Education

During the late Qing and Republican periods, modernist ideas, Christian models, and political revolutions and upheavals fundamentally transformed the “total social phenomenon” in China. (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, pp. 44–79) This transformation resulted in a reconceptualization and reorganization of the discourse surrounding religion and gender (Kang 2016, p. 493). The evolution of Buddhist education for women was shaped by the intersection of feminist movements and Buddhist modernism, thereby fostering a dialog between the revival of Buddhism and the pursuit of gender equality.

Master Taixu, 太虛 (1890–1947), the key figure in the twentieth-century Buddhist modernization movement, is a leading and influential voice in the Buddhist education of both nuns and female laities. Taixu called for the revitalization of Buddhism via institutional reorganization, modern Buddhist education, compassionate social action, and ecumenical cooperation in global missions (Pittman 2001, pp. 2, 96). As the student of Yang Wenhui, 楊文會 (1837–1911), Taixu inherited Yang’s reformist ideal of achieving doctrinal, spiritual, text-based modern Chinese Buddhism using institutional Buddhist education (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, pp. 79–81). He was influenced by Yang’s advocacy of women pursuing Buddhism³ and the rising calls for women’s education led by modernist elites since the May Fourth Movement (DeVido 2015). In 1924, two years after the founding of the Wuchang Buddhist Academy (*Wuchang foxueyuan* 武昌佛學院), Taixu established the

Wuchang Academy for Buddhist women (*Wuchang foxue yan nüzhong yuan*, 武昌佛學院女眾院), the first modern Buddhist seminary for women in Chinese history.

Taixu's advocacy for Buddhist women's education paved the way for new opportunities for Chinese female Buddhists to assume public roles. The Wuchang Academy for Female Buddhists was staffed by both ordained nuns and laywomen with a "scholarly background", such as the nuns Deying, 德瑛; Dingcheng, 定成; and the laywoman Li Dezha, 李德肇. These women were not only able to provide authoritative guidance on Buddhist texts but also demonstrated proficiency in managing business and financial affairs, according to Zhang (1934, p. 88).

In conjunction with the establishment of female Buddhist academies, some well-educated female Buddhists started to express their religious aspirations, modernist ideals, and feminist concerns in Buddhist publications (Yuan 2009; Su 2014). Hengbao, 恆寶, a Buddhist nun who graduated from the Wuchang Academy for Female Buddhists, serves as a prominent example. She founded the all-female school Pure Bodhi Vihara (*puti jingshe*, 菩提精舍) in 1931 and published *The Dedicated Journal for Female Buddhists* (*fojiao nüzhong*, 佛教女眾) in 1937. In the first and the last volume of the journal, Hengbao called for Buddhist women's education to enhance gender equality in education and to assert their roles as dharma educators to promote the "true spirit" of Buddhism (Hengbao 1937).

2.2. Female Buddhist Education in the Chinese Periphery

In the 1930s, female Buddhist seminaries continued to flourish on the mainland, in Macau, and in Hong Kong (He 1997). Macau, which was leased by the Ming dynasty government to Portugal in 1557, flourished as a significant trading port in the late sixteenth century but lost its prominence after the First Opium War, when Hong Kong became a British colony in 1843 (Hao 2011, pp. 10–12). Elizabeth Sinn describes Hong Kong as an "in-between place" (Sinn 2012, p. 9) as, despite not generating a substantial immigrant population of its own, it served as a major transit hub for international immigration during the twentieth century. Its shipping routes connected Hong Kong to North America, the Pacific Islands, and Southeast Asia. Both Hong Kong and Macau had Guangdong province as the near hinterland, and there were continuous flow of capital, culture, and people from the three Cantonese-speaking regions overseas.

These two European colonies further became important junctions for the spanning of the "long journey of female Buddhist activism" (Yuan 2009, p. 399) from Wuhan to South-east China and the diaspora communities. The pioneer of the Buddhist women's movement in Hong Kong and Macau is Ching Lin Kok, 張蓮覺 (or Ho Ching Lin Kok, 何張覺蓮, Lady Clara Ho Tung), the wife of wealthy businessman and philanthropist Robert Ho Tung, 何東.⁴ As Josephine Lai-kuen Wong (2010) has emphasized, the advantageous economic and social position of the Ho Tung families enabled Clara to not only be an active participant in the local Buddhist community but also play a significant role in connecting the Chinese Buddhist communities in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Ching Lin Kok (1875–1938) started the effort to promote Buddhist education for women in 1927, and her initial project was the establishment of the Po Kok Gir's' Charity School (*baojue nüzi yixue*, 寶覺女子義學) in 1931, which became the educational institution for economically disadvantaged girls in Hong Kong. In the same year, she collaborated with Zhang Tao Po, 張濤波, to launch the Second Girls' Charity School (*baojue dier nüzi yixue*, 寶覺第二女子義學) in Macau Gong De Lin, 澳門功德林. However, the operation of this school had to be temporarily suspended after Zhang Tao Bo (or Master Guan Ben, 觀本) decided to attain full ordination.⁵ In 1932, Clara established the Po Kok Buddhist Studies Society (*baojue foxue yanjiushe*, 寶覺佛學研究社) in Hong Kong and invited Master Ai Ting, 藹亭 (1892–1947), who had just arrived in Hong Kong from Jiang Su Province, to conduct dharma teachings. The Tung Lin Kok Yuen, a modern female Buddhist seminary, was finally inaugurated in 1935, combining the Po Kok Buddhist Studies Society and the Po Kok Girls' Charity School (Ai 1936). Prior to her passing in 1938, Clara Ho Tung designated her trusted assistant, Ms. Lin Leng Zhen, 林楞真, succeeded her as head of the seminary. Tung

Lin Kok Yuen, 東蓮覺苑, became one of the most prominent female Buddhist seminaries in China, as recognized by Master Taixu.⁶

As a Eurasian female Buddhist, Clara's ideals of Chinese Buddhism revitalization were influenced by the strategies of Christian missionaries in Hong Kong and the Buddhism modernization movement in mainland China (Wong 2010, p. 144). Like leading female Buddhist educators in Wuchang, Clara's determination to promote female Buddhist education was driven by both feminist and Buddhist concerns. As she wrote in *Ren Hai Deng* (Ho 1936), Tung Lin Kok Yuen had two vital goals: (1) to "relieve the spiritual anguish of women through Buddha's teachings", as achieving women's emancipation must resolve the fundamental spiritual problem and (2) to train dharma preachers to revitalize Chinese Buddhism, which had been hindered by its "prolonged period of stagnation".

From its inception, Tung Lin Kok Yuen has been closely affiliated with modern Buddhist organizations in Guangdong Province. In 1936, the publication of *Ren Hai Deng*, 人海燈, a Buddhist monthly run by the Chaozhou Lingdong Buddhist Association, 潮州嶺東佛學社, and the Chaozhou Kaiyuan Temple, 潮州開元寺, was taken over by Tung Lin Kok Yuen. The periodical was on the brink of suspension the same year as the establishment of Tung Lin Kok Yuen. Master Tong Yi, 通一 (1926–2000), of the Lingdong Buddhist Institute sought assistance from Ai Ting and Clara Ho Tung. Lin Leng Zhen recalls that Tung Lin Kok Yuen's financial situation was similarly precarious at the time. But Clara ultimately chose to relocate the publication of *Ren Hai Deng* to Hong Kong considering the scarcity of Buddhist periodicals in China (Lin 1935, p. 32).

Buddhist women in Hong Kong and Macau became engaged in discussions regarding Buddhist feminism in mainland China with the arrival of Taixu's fellow reformist monks from Xiamen in the 1940s.

Xiamen (also known as Amoy) is a significant treaty port located in southern Fujian Province (Min'nan 閩南). In the twentieth century, Xiamen was comparable to Hong Kong as an "in-between place", as suggested by Ong Soon Keong (2021). It functioned as a transit and embarkation port at the mouth of the Jiu Long River, with Fujian Province as its hinterland. In the early twentieth century, Xiamen also emerged as a hub of the Buddhist modernist movement in southern China, with prominent modernist monks assuming the leadership roles of Nanputuo Monastery, 南普陀寺, and Minnan Buddhist College (Minnan foxueyuan, 閩南佛學院). In 1924, Master Huiquan, 會泉 (1874–1942), was ordained as the abbot of Nanputuo Monastery. He set up the Minnan Buddhist College to provide systematic Buddhist education for the clergy in 1925, establishing it as an influential Buddhist seminary in southeast China during the Republican era. In 1929, Taixu succeeded as the abbot of Nanputuo Monastery and the head of Minnan Buddhist College (Xiamen Fojiao Xiehui 2006, pp. 201–2, 273–79).

In 1939, Master Chuk Mor, 竺摩 (1913–2002), a prominent disciple of Taixu, was convinced by Lin Leng Zhen to resume the female Buddhist education program at Macau Gongde Lin by organizing a Buddhist studies class (*foxue yanjiu ban*, 佛學研究班) (He 1999a, pp. 69–72). Prior to this, Chuk Mor had served as an attendant during Master Taixu's dharma preaching to Chaozhou, Shantou, and Hong Kong in 1933, 1935, and 1936. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, he relocated to Hong Kong, where his reputation grew rapidly (He 1999b).

In 1941, while Master Chuk Mor was teaching the Sandhinirmocana Sutra (*jieshen mijing*, 解深密經) in the Buddhist studies class at Gongde Lin, discussions of Buddhism and gender equality arose among the female students. The debate was sparked by a question from student Jiang Zhiping, 江之萍, regarding the discriminatory discourses toward women in Buddhist scriptures, and Chuk Mor invited Master Taixu and Hong Yi 弘一, to respond. Taixu's response, however, brought the extension of the discussion from gender bias in Buddhist scriptures to the role of women within the monastic system. As he recommended,

"The female Buddhist should remain as a lay Buddhist like Queen Srimala rather than becoming a nun. Since" [becoming a nun] is incompatible with the con-

temporary social environment, neither the dharma nor the people would benefit from it”.⁷

The nun students at Gongde Lin expressed their concerns about the patriarchal influences on Taixu’s response and requested further clarification. In addition, Bhikkhuni Guan Yuan, 觀願, at Jiuhua Mountain utilized the discourse to articulate her stance on gender equality in Buddhism. Drawing inspiration from Jiang Zhiping’s work, she wrote *Why Disdained Nuns* (*he gu qing ni*, 何故輕尼) in the *Jue You Qing*, 覺有情, journal. This series of discussions reflects the continuous calls for equality from Bhikkhuni communities throughout various regions of China (Su 2014, pp. 116–17).

Tung Lin Kok Yuen became the central hub for female Buddhist education in the Cantonese regions. In 1935, Tung Lin Kok Yuen enrolled thirty-six students into the Po Kok Buddhist Society, more than half of them from Guangdong Province, encompassing both Teochew and Cantonese-speaking regions (Figure 1).⁸

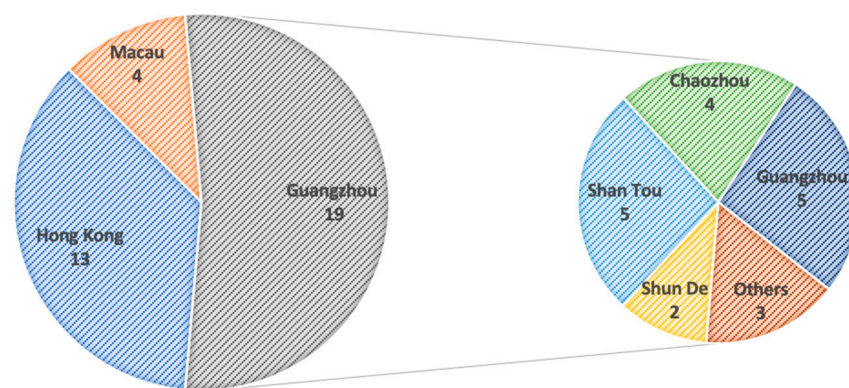


Figure 1. Residential districts of students in 1935.

Modern Buddhist women’s education was also intertwined with long-standing localized female religious experiences and traditions, especially “The Great way of Former Heaven” or “The Way of Former Heaven” (*xiantian dao*/Hsien-T’ien Tao, 先天道).

Vegetarian Nuns

“The Great way of Former Heaven” is an esoteric religious sect that systematically developed in China during the Ming dynasty (AD 1368–1644) (Topley 1963). Despite the claims in its scriptures of having roots in the Chan school of Buddhism (*chanzong*, 禪宗), scholars often categorize the Great Way as “lay Buddhism”, a “sect”, or a “redemptive society” due to the syncretism and sectarianism of its religion systems (Broy 2015, p. 147; Show 2020b, pp. 233–34). By the turn of the twentieth century, the “Great Way” had spread to southern mainland China, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia.

Traditionally, male and female members of *Xiantian dao* reside in separate quarters, with the male quarters known as the “Hall of Heaven” (*Qian tang*, 乾堂) and the female quarters as the “Hall of Earth” (*Kun tang*, 坤堂). In the Canton region, vegetarian halls attracted a large number of “women who comb their own hair” (*zishu nü*, 自梳女), a Cantonese female group that was distinguished by their resistance to marriage, worship of Guanyin, and organization into sisterhoods (Ngai 2015, p. 382; Topley 1963). In Hong Kong and Singapore, vegetarian halls have become a secure option for their religious practices and retirement guarantees (Topley 1963, 1978). Thus, in the early twentieth century, female vegetarian halls grew rapidly and gradually shaped the mainstream image (Show 2018b). Women who reside in vegetarian halls are referred to as “vegetarian nuns” or “*zhaigu*, 齋姑” in Cantonese. Unlike the consistent expansion of Buddhist modernism, the transformation of vegetarian nuns’ traditions varied geographically.

The system of Hsien-T’ien Tao vegetarian halls had a significant presence in the Canton region and grew rapidly during the second decade of the 20th century (Topley and

Hayes 1968, pp. 411–12). However, Cantonese vegetarian nuns could still possess fluid religious identities and, as per Sankar's study in Hong Kong, may reside in both Buddhist monasteries and vegetarian halls. Additionally, they may even elect delegates to become nuns and pool their funds to establish a Buddhist monastery (Sankar 1978).

In Tung Lin Kok Yuen, there were female youths who came from vegetarian halls with the “The Great way” tradition. Shu Zhen, 樹真, a member of the first batch of students in the Buddhist Studies Society, came from Zi Xia Jing She, 紫霞精舍 (Lin 1936, p. 32). It is a vegetarian hall under the Cang Xia Dong sect, 藏霞洞 and was established by the “Great Way” master Tang Zhaolong, 湯兆龍, and his female follower Li Qingqi, 李清琦 (Li 2005b, p. 95).

In Fujian, before the 1980s, the presence of nuns was rare, and the majority of Buddhist women in the region remained un-tonsured as vegetarian nuns (*caigu* 菜姑) or were called “virtuous women of Buddhist faith” (*fanxing qingxin nü*, 梵行清信女) (Hongyi 1992; Chen 2000, pp. 63–65). The Fujianese *caigu* and their vegetarian halls were almost separate from the “Great Way” tradition in the early twentieth century. They were commonly “converted to the Three Refuges and Five Precepts”, as noted by Master Hong Yi 弘一 (1880–1942). In 1948, the first Buddhist seminary for women in Fujian, Juehua Women's Buddhist College (*Juehua nuzi foxueyuan*, 覺華女子佛學院), was established at the Xiamen Taiping Yan temple, 太平岩, and primarily aimed to educate vegetarian nuns in the southern Fujian (*Min'nan*, 閩南) region. The college was set up with the assistance of Xing Yuan but led and chaired by Xingyuan's female disciple Chen Zhenzhen, 陳珍珍. After graduation, some prominent *caigu* went overseas, founding their temples in maritime Southeast Asia and the United States (Chen 2000, pp. 63–65; Show 2021, pp. 137–39).

This section aims to provide a more extensive historical context for the evolution of Buddhist education for women in the South China Sea. In parallel with the spread of Chinese Buddhist modernism, it highlights the transregional continuity of female Buddhist activism during the first half of the twentieth century and draws attention to the gender disparities present in the discourse within reformist Buddhist communities. In addition, the section emphasizes the dialectical and regional aspects of Buddhist seminaries. The modern experience of female Buddhist education and local religious traditions for women can be intricately intertwined in the “transnational circulations of people, knowledge, and capital” (Chia 2020a, p. 6) between Greater China and Southeast Asia.

3. Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution in Context

The historical development of Singapore Chinese Buddhism in the 20th century is inextricably intertwined with the popularization of “Humanistic Buddhism” in the region, as demonstrated by Hsu (2021, p. 10). Scholars tend to mark the turning point for Chinese Buddhism in British Malay at the founding of the Penang Kek Lok Si Temple, 檳城極樂寺, in 1891 and trace the growth of modern Chinese Buddhism to 1926, when Taixu and his companions from Nanputuo Monastery began making iterated travels to maritime Southeast Asia (Hue 2020, pp. 176–89). Modernist migrant monks, particularly Cihang, 慈航 (1895–1954); Yen Pei, 演培 (1917–1996); and Chuk Mor, 竺摩 (1913–2002), were significant proponents of modern Buddhist institutions, education, and social welfare organization in the British colonies of Malaya. They were highly visible participants in the writing of Buddhist networks across the South China Sea (Kan 2020; Chia 2020a).

While the instrumental role of modernist monks is apparent, the contribution of Buddhist women cannot be disregarded. Women exhibit greater mobility and initiative in their transregional Buddhist practices, contrasting with conventional depictions of subordination in monk-led historical narratives. This dynamic can be evidenced in the development of female Buddhist education in Southeast Asia.

The advancement of female Buddhist education in the Malay Peninsula was spearheaded by the nun Fang Lian, 芳蓮 (1900–1937). Born in Xiamen, Fang Lian was ordained under Master Daojie, 道階 (1966–1934), at the age of sixteen. Fang Lian traveled to Southeast Asia around 1920, accompanied by her vegetarian nun disciples Wu Kuanding, 吳寬定

(dharma name: Ji Lian, 繼蓮), and Chen Cihua, 陳慈華. In 1934, she founded the Penang Phor Tay School, 檳城菩提學院, with the support of both her disciples and local female followers. The school, which functioned as a charitable orphanage, a Buddhist temple, and a Buddhist educational institution, was a multifaceted endeavor.

Although the Phor Tay School was not structured as a systematic Buddhist seminary, it was the first Buddhist institution in Malaysia and Singapore that offered modern Buddhist education for women. The majority of residents and students at the Phor Tay School were vegetarian nuns, including Chen Kuanzong, 陳寬宗 (?–1957)⁹, who succeeded as abbess after Fang Lian's early demise in 1937 (Tan 2004, p. 157). While Fang Lian primarily taught Buddhist studies courses, she also invited Mater Daojie to deliver dharma talks at the school (Shi 2010, pp. 341–42; Tan 2005, p. 51). In 1933, Fang Lian also arranged for a group of Phor Tay students to attend the Minnan Buddhist College (Xiamen Fojiao Xiehui 2006, p. 280).

In 1940, with the aim of realizing Fanglian's posthumous wish to establish a Buddhist charity school, Chen Kuanzong put forth plans for the establishment of the Phor Tay Charity School, 菩提義學, and sought the assistance of Ong Loon So, 王弄書, a renowned Fujianese Buddhist educator and female disciple of Cihang.¹⁰ Female lay educators, including Pitt Chin Hui, 畢俊輝; Chen Shaoying, 陳少英; Wu Renjun, 吳人俊; and Ho Shuying, 何淑英, were also invited to serve as teachers. The school, upon its establishment, enrolled over 80 disadvantaged and orphaned children. In the same year, Cihang embarked on a long visit to Burma, stopping in Penang, where Ong Loon So invited him to give a lecture at the Phor Tay School. This event garnered the participation of a number of Chinese community leaders in Penang and attracted financial support from merchants, particularly Hu Wenhui, 胡文虎, and Hu Wenbao, 胡文豹, thereby enabling the expansion of the Phor Tay School and facilitating broader collaboration (Por Tay School 1947, p. 5).

Consequently, two pioneering public Buddhist schools were established in Malaya with support from Master Cihang and Chinese Buddhist devotees. The first of these schools, the Phor Tay Primary School (菩提小學), was founded in 1946, followed by the Phor Tay Secondary School (菩提中學) in 1954 (Por Tay School 1947, p. 9; Tan 2004, pp. 151, 157). A total of twenty-seven Buddhist women served as board members and participated in the management of the Phor Tay Charity School, including nuns, laywomen, and vegetable vendors (Por Tay School 1947, p. 5). Additionally, twenty of the teaching staff were also women, each possessing advanced degrees and prior teaching experience (Por Tay School 1947, pp. 16–17).

The Penang Phor Tay school not only marked the expansion of Taixu's ideal of Chinese Buddhist modernism in the region but also demonstrated how Buddhist women can be active agents in this progression. Its subsequent affiliated organizations provided the earliest convenient platform for more women to engage in Buddhist social welfare and the Buddhist educational system, thereby enhancing their presence in the Buddhist community of Malaysia.

The establishment of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution marked the creation of a modern Buddhist seminary for women in the Malay Peninsula. However, the female Buddhist community of Phor Tay School would play a significant role in providing fundamental support, including people, experiences, and social resources.

3.1. The Establishment of SGBI

3.1.1. Leadership and Organization

The initiative to create a female Buddhist seminary in Singapore was initially proposed by Lin Dajian, 林達堅; nun Jue Zhen, 覺真; and Yong Zhao, 永兆, in 1959. They received prompt support from Buddhist women including Jian Daxian, 簡達賢; Chen Xinping, 陳心平; Pitt Chin Hui, 畢俊輝; and nun Miao Li, 妙理. In March of the same year, the initiators arranged a forum to deliberate on the proposal, which brought together a total of forty female Buddhists. At this forum, the attendees decided to name the school the "Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution" and to adopt "Loving Kindness, Compassion,

Joy, and Equanimity” (*Cibei xishe*, 慈悲喜捨) as the school’s motto. They concurred with Lin Dajian’s proposal to build the school facilities on the old site of her Buddhist lodge, Phor Thay Lan Jiok (菩提蘭若) (Nanyang Shangbao 1962). A preparatory committee consisting of twenty-five members was established (see Appendix A). Lin Dajian, Jue Zhen, Yong Zhao, and Pitt Chin Hui were designated land trustees and tasked with fundraising efforts in both Singapore and Malaysia.

Ultimately, the first and only Buddhist seminary for women in Singapore officially opened on 8 February 1962. The launch ceremony was attended by several Chinese Buddhist leaders, including Master Chuk Mor and Lee Choon Seng, 李俊承¹¹ (Nanyang Shangbao 1962). The core founders of SGBI comprised the first management board of the committee (Table 1); Chen Xinping served as head and lecturer of Buddhist studies at SGBI.

Table 1. The first management committee.

Chairman	Vice Chairman	Treasurer	Secretary
Lin Dajian 林達堅	Shi Jue Zhen 釋覺真	Shi Miao Li 釋妙理	Li Ci Ling 李慈靈

SGBI was registered as a private religious academy and thus was not eligible for subsidies from the Singapore Ministry of Education; as a result, the institution had to rely on three sources of funding: (1) annual donations from the management committee and exceptional contributions from external donors; (2) a modest amount of tuition and fees from students; and (3) a triennial charity sale (Singapore Girls’ Buddhist Institution 1967, p. 2). Despite receiving financial support from Singapore Buddhist communities (refer to Section 4), SGBI has maintained an all-female administration team since its inception (Table 2). The committee and board of trustees exclusively comprised women, and the head position at SGBI has always been held by a female Buddhist.

Table 2. Heads of SGBI.

Tenure	1962–1965	1965–1970	1970–1972	1972–1975
Name	Chen Xinping 陳心平	Shi Nengdu 釋能度	Shi Kuan Yen 釋寬嚴	Shi Xian Xiang 釋賢祥

In the inaugural address, Master Chuk Mor contextualized the genesis of SGBI as a constituent of the modernization movement of Chinese Buddhism in Singapore and a continuation of institutional Buddhist female education in pre-war mainland China (Nanyang Shangbao 1962). Analogous to the foundation of Buddhist seminaries by women in Greater China during the twentieth century, the intentions of SGBI were to espouse both religious and gender pursuits. The primary objective of the initiators was to “uplift the education of underprivileged girls in local temples and provide a platform for young Buddhist women to delve into advanced Buddhist studies” (Nanyang Shangbao 1959). As was manifest in the school anthem (Figure 2), which Master Chuk Mor composed for SGBI, the school’s purpose was to “promote Buddhist teachings” while concurrently endeavoring to “win glory for Singaporean Buddhist women”.

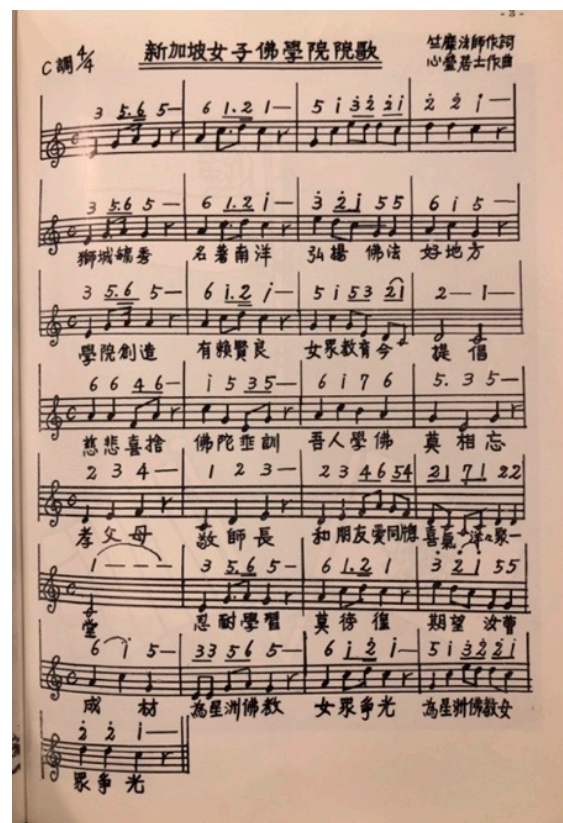


Figure 2. The school anthem of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution¹².

SGBI admitted both nuns and un-ordained female Buddhist adolescents aged 12 to 25. (Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution 1967, p. 2). However, the institution's primary focus was to enroll "illiterate female adolescents and girls above school age from vegetarian halls and nunneries in Singapore and Malaysia 星馬各齋堂寺庵中的年輕文盲和超齡子弟" (Nanyang Shangbao 1962). The custom of adopting young girls has been a longstanding tradition among female vegetarian halls since their origin in China. Due to their celibacy vow, vegetarian nuns may resort to the adoption of young girls as a mechanism for resolving succession issues. The organizational structure of vegetarian halls is based on the notion of "pseudo-kinship", where spiritual and generational bonds between members are often expressed in terms of kinship (Topley 1954; 1963, pp. 228–30). In addition to fulfilling parental obligations, vegetarian nuns also provide support for the education of girls. And in Singapore, women in the vegetarian halls often chose to foster young children as Buddhists (Topley 1954, pp. 61–62; Show 2020a, p. 142).

SGBI was tasked with transforming girls from diverse backgrounds into "authentic Buddhists", but it encountered a challenge in the form of limited religious literacy among its student population. Yen Pei used to express his concern about SGBI students' lack of Buddhism knowledge. These young female students, as he noted, "despite having grown up in nunneries or vegetarian halls, have limited understanding of the Triratna (*sanbao* 三寶)" (Yen Pei 1989, p. 369).

3.1.2. Development and Transformation

SGBI's educational framework was modeled around Taixu's design for long-term, systematic Sangha education (Taixu 1931). It offered a preliminary program, as well as intermediate (four years) and advanced (two years) programs catering to elementary, middle, and high school levels, respectively. The primary focus of the curriculum is Buddhist studies, with "Worldly Studies" serving as a complement (*foxue wei zhu, shixue wei fu*, 佛学为主, 世学为辅). "Worldly studies" adhered to the curricula mandated by the Educa-

tion Ministry of Singapore and included multilingual literature, arts, and mathematics, as well as lessons on physiology and hygiene beyond the intermediate level (Shi 2015b, p. 9).

SGBI's educational and gender narratives also aligned with Taixu's ideal of upasika (*youpoyi*, 優婆夷) education at the beginning stage. Taixu emphasized that the prior role of lay Buddhist women in the Buddhism revival was to be a "virtuous mother" (*fohua zhi mu*, 佛化之母). He suggested that lay Buddhist women are "the crucial factor for the Buddhacization family" and that upasika education "should prioritize family and household management education, so that upasika will be able to lead their Buddhacization family in the future".¹³ Education for lay females was thus differentiated from that for nuns, who were expected to be "virtuous teachers" (*yifang zhishi*, 一方之師) in the preaching of dharma (Su 2014).

At the inaugural ceremony, Pitt Chin Hui stated two major goals for SGBI: first, to "educate qualified professionals to preach Buddha-Dharma" and, second, to build a "Buddhacization family" (*fohua jiating*, 佛化家庭) and a "Buddhacization world" (*fohua shijie*, 佛化世界) via "Buddhacization education" (*fohua jiaoyu*, 佛化教育). *The Purpose of Establishing Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution* (Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution 1967, p. 1). proposed by the founders further clarifies SGBI's expectation for lay female Buddhists in terms of responsibilities in the household:

"Mostly, women generally play a key role in managing their families. If the influence of homemakers can be leveraged to foster Buddhist families, their children can be enlightened by Buddhist teachings, and humanity's true wisdom may be revealed This can help to rectify the minds of the populace and preserve the social and global peace. Hence, the establishment of Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution at this time is of utmost importance."¹⁴

However, after 1966, SGBI shifted its focus to becoming an advanced Buddhist studies academy and Sangha educational institution. In an interview, its mission was declared to be

"Training a group of young people with a true knowledge of Buddhism and a commitment to its promotion. They may propagate Buddha's teachings to all sentient beings, eliminate superstitious elements, and restore Buddhism's glories."¹⁵

For the 1970s graduating class of SGBI, the then-committee chairman, nun Miao Li, expressed her aspiration that the students would either continue their studies at SGBI or pursue further Buddhist education overseas. Alternatively, Buddhist students should at least commit themselves to serving their own religion, nation, or family (Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution 1970, p. 7).

In 1966, the head of SGBI, nun Nengdu, standardized syllabi and textbooks for Buddhist studies courses (Shi et al. 2010, p. 414) beside sutras such as the *Three Sutras on the Buddha's Bequeathed Teachings* (遺教三經, *yijiao sanjing*) and the *Abbreviated Essentials on the Precepts for Monks* (*shami lüyi*, 沙彌律儀). Nengdu also incorporated works by Master Yinshun and Chuk Mor, including *The Primary Buddhist Textbook* (*xiaoxue foxue keben*, 小學佛學課本), *The Path to Buddhahood* (*chengfozhidao*, 成佛之道) by Yinshun, and *The Elementary Buddhist Textbook* (*chuji foxue keben*, 初級佛學課本) by Chuk Mor (Shi et al. 2010, p. 414; Shi 2015b, p. 10).

At the outset, most students had not yet been tonsured (Jingkai 1997, p. 227), but by 1968, the number of students enrolled in SGBI reached its peak, and the number of ordained samanens (*shamini*, 沙彌尼) and nuns also increased. Contrary to Taixu's reserved attitude toward nunhood, SGBI viewed the increasing number of tonsured students as progress (Nanyang Shangbao 1968b). That same year, SGBI sent its first two student nuns, who were young disciples of Ku Le An, 苦樂庵, to continue their education at the Taixu Buddhist Institute in Taipei (*Taibei taixu foxueyuan*, 台北太虛佛學院) (Nanyang Shangbao 1968a; Shi et al. 2010, p. 236).

SGBI also encouraged its students to publish in Buddhist periodicals, and they were especially active in *Nanyang Buddhism* (*Nanyang Fo jiao* 南洋佛教) from 1969 to 1971, as can be seen from Figure 3.

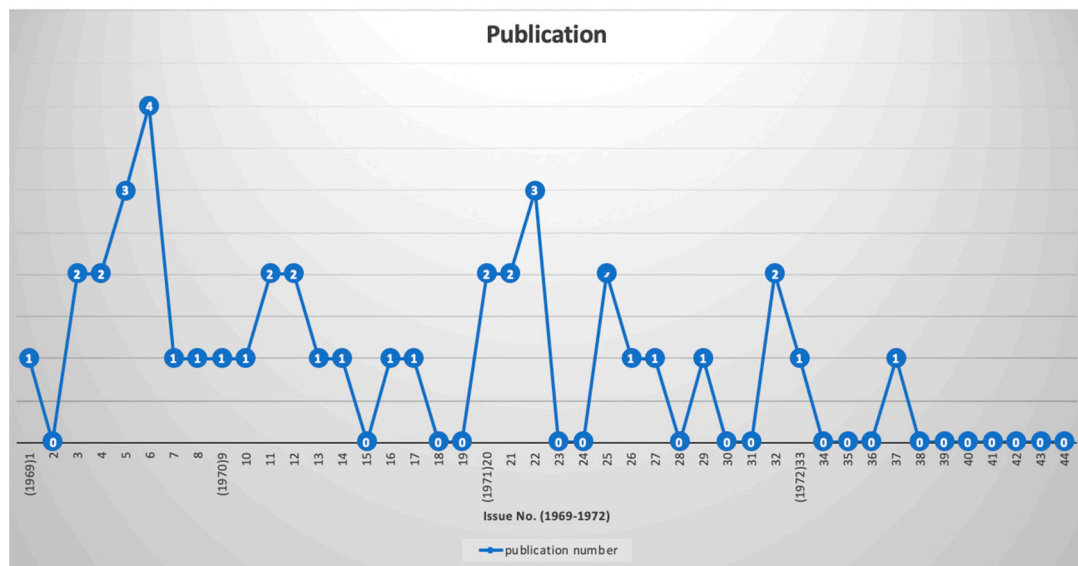


Figure 3. Publications by SGBI students in *Nanyang Fojiao*.

The majority of student works were published in the “Buddhist Youth Corner” (*foqing yuandi*, 佛青園地), and the author’s name would be affixed with the designation of either “Singapore Girls’ Buddhist Institute” (*xinjiapo nüzi foxueyuan*) or “Women’s Buddhist Institute” (*nüzi foxueyuan* 女子佛學院). The articles written by the students covered various topics, including

- (1) Documentation of the monks’ dharma teachings at SGBI. In the first issue of *Nanyang Buddhism* in 1969, student Liang Shenghuan, 梁聖浣, published her record of Master Chang Jue (常覺)’s lecture at SGBI (p. 33).
- (2) Personal reflections grounded in the principles of Humanistic Buddhism. For instance, in Issue 5 of 1969, Chen Jingping, 陳淨萍, wrote about the relief from life’s sufferings (p. 32); Deng Jingyao, 鄧淨耀, discussed the methods employed by bodhisattvas to save people and the promotion of dharma for the benefit of human life (p. 32); and Jing Zhen authored *Talking to Meat Eaters* (*xiang roushizhe jinyan*, 向肉食者進言) in support of vegetarianism.
- (3) Documentation of participation in Buddhist community activities in Singapore, particularly the Vesak Day Parade hosted by the SBF.
- (4) Special editions to commemorate Buddhist institutions or memorialize monks: the sixth issue in 1969, in which the number of students’ articles reached its peak, was an issue honoring the inauguration of the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic. And Issue 11 of 1970 is in memory of Mater Zhuan An, 轉岸.

In 1973, Yen Pei referred to SGBI as the “pioneer of Singapore’s Sangha education” for producing “specialists at preaching the Buddha-Dharma and qualify abbess”, which differentiated itself from general “Buddhization education” (Diguan 1973).

3.1.3. Discussion

The evolution of SGBI can be roughly divided into two phases. The founding of SGBI as a modern Buddhist seminary in 1962 marks a significant milestone in the expansion of Chinese Buddhist modernism in Singapore. However, the gender narrative of SGBI is somewhat disconnected from the Buddhist feminist discussion that was prevalent in modern China during the first half of the twentieth century. The essence of twentieth-century Buddhist feminist activism is “de-gendering,” which called for women to be recognized not just by gender roles within the traditional Chinese domestic structure but equally as educators, dharma propagators, and modern citizens (Kang 2016). It was not until 1965

that the discourse around women's roles in Humanistic Buddhism began to shift at SGBI and gradually gravitated toward the monastic, scholarly, and doctrinal traits.

Jack Meng-Tat Chia (2020c) divides the development of Humanistic Buddhism in Singapore into three phases: (1) Taixu's Human Life Buddhism; (2) Yen Pei's "Humanistic Buddhism"; and (3) the rise of Taiwanese Humanistic Buddhist organizations in contemporary Singapore. Chia centers his discussion on the leading masters, but the destination seems more akin to what Travagnin (2017) calls a paradigm shift. Travagnin (2017, pp. 226–27) viewed Buddhist reform as the history of the "Taixu paradigm" rather than solely of Taixu, with the prominent monk serving as a representation of organizational structures and educational strategies achieved by a wider range of individuals.

Although not entirely temporally concurrent, the development of SGBI echoed the paradigm transition in the broader Buddhist landscape. But as a women-led academy, SGBI's transformation also reflects the changing ecology of the local Buddhist women's community and the expansion of the transnational Bhikkhuni network.

4. Affiliations and Cooperation: Buddhist Women in Movements

Elise DeVido (2015, pp. 79–80) suggests that Holmes Welch's definition of Buddhist affiliations (Welch 1967, pp. 403–5) could also apply to Buddhist women. This would not only characterize them by religious kinship, loyalty to a charismatic monk, and dialectic regionalism but also incorporate (1) the connection between classmates in the same Buddhist school or institute and (2) the affiliation of female participants in Buddhist organizations and institutes. By tracking committee members who attended the first meeting in 1959, it was observed that the bulk of the institution's founders had Guangdong origins and had established their own Buddhist temples or vegetarian halls (Appendix A). In the case of SGBI, the "networks of affiliation" could be more intricate and superimposed due to their heterogeneous nature, flexible migration experiences, flexible "loyalty" to modernist monks, and the active social engagement of religious women.

4.1. Penang and Singapore, Laywomen and Vegetarian Nuns

In his paper on the modernization of Chinese Buddhism in Singapore, Sheng Kai (2019, p. 49) highlights the active presence of lay Buddhist women in Singapore's Chinese Buddhist community since the 1940s. Even most of the "monasteries" listed by Shengkai are Buddhist vegetarian halls built by vegetarian nuns. Shengkai's argument reflects, in a way, the transformation of many vegetarian halls into pure Buddhist temples and the active presence of lay Buddhist women in Singapore's orthodox Chinese Buddhist community since the 1940s. Laywomen were also a significant driving force for the establishment of SGBI. Before the establishment of SGBI, the female members had built up solid partnerships through their active involvement in Buddhist schools, temples, organizations, and vegetarian businesses.

Two core leaders of SGBI, Pitt Chin Hui (1900–1981) and Chen Xinping (1906–1977), came from Penang. Pitt Chin Hui (or Pitt Ci Hui, 畢慈輝) was born in Guangdong and moved to Penang with her Buddhist mother at the age of five. Pitt had been an English teacher at Penang Hokkien Girls' School (檳城福建女校) before Ong Loon Soo invited her to join the Penang Phor Tay School in 1938. She was regarded as one of the most outstanding female lay disciples of Master Cihang in Southeast Asia (Hue 2020, pp. 288–91). Chen Xinping, a native of Fujian, used to be the principal of the Burma Chinese Girl's Secondary School before moving to Penang. She was also a disciple of Master Cihang and ordained as a nun with the dharma name Yuan Xing, 遠行, in 1967 (Shi 2010, p. 346). Together, Pitt and Chen collaborated as Buddhist studies lecturers in Phor Tay school and were instrumental in establishing and administrating the Phor Tay Primary School and Phor Tay Secondary School.

Chen remained in Penang until her appointment as the head of SGBI, while Pitt began traveling between Singapore and Penang in 1942.¹⁶ In 1947, Pitt settled in Singapore to lead the establishment of the Singapore Maha Bodhi School (*Xinjiapo puti xuexiao*, 新加坡菩提學

校), as suggested by Master Cihang (Hue 2020, pp. 291–92). The founding of the Singapore Maha Bodhi School also received substantial support from Singapore's local laywomen and vegetarian nuns who would later be involved in the establishment of SGBI, including financial contributions from Li Ci Ling, Lin Dajian, and Yang Muzhen, 楊慕貞 (Maha Bodhi School 1951, p.10; Shi et al. 2010, p. 312). Following being appointed as principal of the Singapore Maha Bodhi School in 1948, Pitt Chin Hui received assistance in her work from Qiu Yulan 邱玉蘭 (Hue 2020, p. 292).

Born in Xiamen, Lin Dajian (originally named Lin Aiyu, 林愛玉) was another notable female disciple of Master Cihang in Singapore (Huansheng 1991). In 1943, she led the construction of the Leng Feng Phor Tay School (Lingfeng puti xueyuan, 靈峰菩提學院) along with other local lay female Buddhists, including Ruan Huiyin, 阮慧因; Cai Yanda, 蔡演達; and Mai Shengji, 麥聖集, and this became Master Cihang's first educational lodging in Singapore. Lin also set up Fa Shi Lin Temple 法施林 for Cihang's residency (Leng Foong Prajna Temple 2009, pp. 101–2). For four years, Master Cihang provided dharma teachings at the Leng Foong Phor Tay School and was attended by Qu Xianhui, Jian Daxian, and Wen Zhishun (Leng Foong Prajna Temple 2009, p. 85). Pitt Chin Hui attended the Leng Feng Phor Tay School in 1944 at Master Cihang's request and was later asked to teach at Fa Shi Lin Temple after returning from Penang in 1947 (Hue 2020, p. 291).

After Master Cihang left Singapore in 1948, Lin Dajian oversaw Leng Feng for the next fifteen years until Master Yen Pei stepped in as abbot in 1965. Yen Pei's first visit to Malaysia and Singapore was in 1958, when he was invited by Master Long Gen, 隆根, after his dharma tour of Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. Yen Pei visited several Cihang-related venues and had extensive interactions with Cihang's disciples in Singapore, including Pitt Chin Hui, Lin Dajian, Li Ci Ling, and Chen Xinping. Additionally, he was asked to tour SGBI during its construction phase (Yen Pei 1989, pp. 337–71).

In 1963, Lin Dajian invited Yen Pei to lead a puja for the tenth-year anniversary of Master Cihang's demise in Phor Thay Lan Jiok. She proposed adding Yen Pei as Leng Feng's trustee and granting Yen Pei full authority. In fact, according to Master Yen Pei, his decision to stay in Singapore was directly influenced by Lin Dajian, Chen Xinping, and Jue Zhen of SGBI (Yen Pei 1989, pp. 393–94, 404–6). In 1965, Yen Pei stepped in as the abbot of Leng Feng. He decided to reconstruct the old property and rename it "Leng Foong Prajna Temple" (*Lingfeng bore jiangtang*, 靈峰般若講堂) (Leng Foong Prajna Temple 2009, p. 103).

The construction work was again arranged by Lin Dajian (Hui Yuan) and her female partners at SGBI, including Qu Xianhui (or Qu Ci Fa, 區慈法), Wen Zhishun (or Hui Min, 慧敏), Jian Daxian (Hui Ping, 慧平), and nun Nengdu. (Leng Foong Prajna Temple 2009, p. 90). Lin Dajian became Yen Pei's essential attendant in Singapore after 1965, and as the trustee of SGBI, she retained the link between SGBI and Yen Pei even after SGBI ceased operations in 1975.

Lin Dajian received Bodhisattva Precepts under Master Zongrao, 宗繞, in Penang at the age of forty, and in 1965, she was ordained as a bhikkhuni (dharma name: Hui Yuan, 慧圓) under Master Yin Shun, 印順, in 1965 (Shi et al. 2010, p. 241). Although most Buddhist publications refer to Lin Dajian as a "lay Buddhist woman" (nū jushi, 女居士) before her tonsure, Show (2021, p. 169) also reminds us of the fluidity of her religious identities, as Lin Dajian was also a representative figure of vegetarian nuns in Singapore. Vegetarian nuns in Singapore, besides their unwavering commitment to celibacy and communal dwelling arrangements separate from familial milieus, must establish their own self-sufficient sources of financial support. This encourages some vegetarian nuns to participate in entrepreneurial ventures, and in Singapore, Buddhist women and vegetarian halls are closely bound to the vegetarian business (Show 2020a, p. 151).

In 1948, Lin Dajian, along with two other female Buddhists, Qu Xianhui, 區賢慧 (1922–1996), and Wen Zhi Soon (1921–2007) established her own hall, Phor Thay Lan Jiok, 菩提蘭若, in Singapore. She also opened Singapore's first vegetarian restaurant, Loke Woh Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant, 六合園素菜館, with Jian Daxian, 簡達賢¹⁷; Qiu Yulan, and Yang Mu Zhen. Besides Loke Woh Yuen Vegetarian Restaurant, Yang Mu Zhen then set up

another vegetarian restaurant, Bodhi Lin, 菩提林, with Qiu Yulan in January 1954 (Tan 2022). When SGBI held vegetarian food charity sales for fundraising in 1960, 1964, and 1966, nearly all of the contributors were nunneries or vegetarian halls (Xingzhou Ribao 1960, 1964; Nanyang Shangbao 1966a); in 1960 and 1966, there were, respectively, twenty-four and thirty-six groups participating in SGBI's charity sales events, most of which were founded or managed by Cantonese people (refer to Appendix C).

Vegetarian nuns' transformation into Buddhist nuns since the 1960s corresponds to the broader "Buddhistization" trend of vegetarian halls during the mid-twentieth century, which resulted from the "putative need" of vegetarian halls to attract new members, the local government's strategy of homogenizing minority religions, and Buddhist authorities' continuous campaign to "purify" Chinese people in the twentieth century (Show 2020b, pp. 241–42). This transformation could also be observed in SGBI's leadership communities. For example, Wen Zhi Soon tonsured under Master Yinshun in Taiwan with the dharma name Hui Min, 慧敏, and obtained full bhikkhuni ordination from Master Bai Sheng, 白聖 (Shi 2010, p. 241; 2013, p. 369). Jian Daxian (1912–1994) was tonsured under Master Yinshun in 1964 (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 220–23; Shi 2010, p. 350).

Nevertheless, despite their involvement in Buddhist organizations, some vegetarian halls and vegetarian nuns may also hold on to their dialecticism and sectarianism traditions. Yang Muzhen, for example, is the host of Taoyuan Fut Tong (taoyuan fotang, 桃園佛堂). Established in 1938, Taoyuan Fut Tong used to set up an elderly mutual aid society with over four thousand members (Xingzhou Ribao 1962), and it is a vegetarian hall within the "Great Way" tradition (Show 2020a, p. 169).

The lineage of the "Xiantian Dao" vegetarian hall network in Singapore is extremely complicated, but it can be roughly divided into two sects: (1) The Dong Chu Branch (東初派), which descended from the "Metal Patriarch" lineage (jinzu, 金祖) and can be further split into the Chaoyuan Dong system (朝元洞系), the Nanshan system (南山系) and Wanshou Shan (萬壽山系), and (2) the Wan Quan Tang Branch (萬全堂派) under the "Water Patriarch" (shuizu, 水祖), which can be further split into Guangdong Zi Xia Dong (廣東紫霞洞) and Qingyuan Feixia Dong (清遠縣飛霞洞) (Show 2018a; Qi 2019). These two main streams have their roots in Guangdong and Hong Kong (Ngai 2015, pp. 333–80). (See Figure 4).

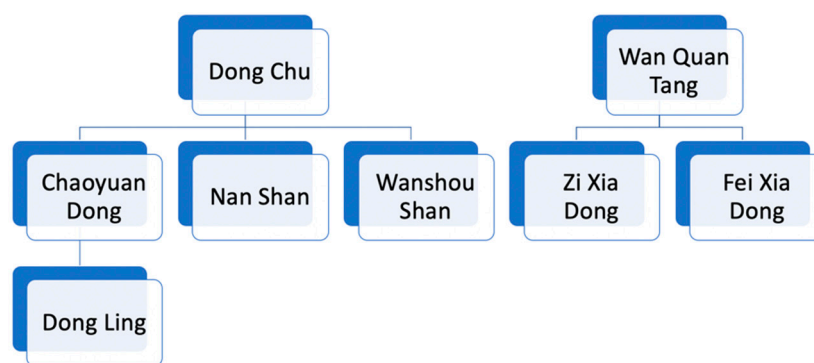


Figure 4. The main sect branch of "Xiantian Dao" in Singapore.

As can be seen from the donation list from 1971 (Appendix B), the external sponsors of SGBI included several "Xiantian Dao" vegetarian halls and sectarian masters. Tong Sian Tng Temple is on the list, for example, which was established by Ma Chunqing (馬純清) in 1892 (Dean and Thye 2017, pp. 1237–38). Ma was born in Chaoyang District, Guangdong, and became the master of the Dongling lineage 東陵系, a localized subdivision of the Great Way's Chaoyuan Branch in Singapore and Malaysia (Lin 1941, p. 7; Show 2018b, pp. 10–53). One of the donors was Luo Jiazhao, 羅佳兆, who moved from Guangdong to Singapore and was the disciple of Ma Chunqing at Tong Sian Tng (Lin 1941, p. 9).

In Singapore, the Feixia branch was developed by sectarian Master Mai Tai Kai, 麥泰開, the nephew of Feixia Dong's founder Mak Chang Tian, 麥長天 (1842–1929). Mai Tai Kai

was born in Sanshui District (三水), Guangdong, and established several vegetarian halls such as Feixia Jingshe, 飛霞精舍; Tao Yuan Tang, 桃園堂; Daguang Tang, 大光堂; and Yuan Jue Jing She, 圓覺精舍 (Ngai 2015, pp. 479–80). Yang Muzhen's Taoyuan Fut Tong (*taoyuan fotang* 桃園佛堂) was sometimes referred as “Taoyuan Tang, 桃園堂”. Although there is no conclusive proof that this is the same “Taoyuan Tang” formed by Mai Tai Kai, there are indications of ties between Yang Muzhen and Mai Tai Kai, particularly via their activities in the Cantonese territorial organization Kwong Wai Siew Peck San Theng (*guanghuzhao bishanting*, 廣惠肇碧山亭).

Peck San Theng served as a burial ground for migrations from Guangzhou (廣州), Zhao Qing (肇慶), and Huizhou (惠州) in Guangdong Province. Since 1921, one of the most important activities of the Peck San Theng has been “The Charitable Assembly of Ten Thousand People (Wanrenyuan hui 萬人緣會)” (Li 2013, p. 2). Derived from the Yu Lan Festival and Zhongyuan Festival, *Wanrenyuan hui* combines the redemptive function of deliverance with the benevolent purpose of fundraising. It involves monks and Taoist priests and nuns and integrating Taoist and Buddhist ritualic traditions. *Wanrenyuan hui* is widely practiced in Guangdong, Hong Kong, and overseas Cantonese communities (Yau 2019).

In the 1950s, Mai Tai Kai directed the Dharma and Vegetarian Affairs Unit of events, with all the female members of Mai's vegetarian hall, Da Guang Tang, and Fei Xia Jingshe having joined the Vegetarian Affairs Unit. Yang Muzhen served as the Deputy Director of the Dharma Affairs Unit (Li 2013, p. 18). In 1958, Yang Muzhen was once again chosen as director of Dharma Affairs. In addition, the year saw the participation of many local female vegetarian halls and various religious organizations with connections to SGBI's Cantonese founders, including Loke Woh Yuen, Bohdi Lin, Ku Le An, Du Ming An, Fa Hua An, Ding Xiu An Temple, San Bao An Temple, and Guan Yi An (Li 2013, pp. 22–23). In addition, a significant portion of the female vegetarian halls that participated joined Peck San Theng's *Wanrenyuan hui* in 1958, and they were similarly active in SGBI's vegetarian food charity sales events (Table 3).

Table 3. List of vegetarian halls.

Name	Founded Year	Founder/Administrator
Pu Fu Tang, 普福堂	1930s	Yong Kong, 永空
Buddhist Studies Organization, 佛學研究院/Guan Ci Jingshe, 觀慈精舍	1930s	Da Guan, 達觀 Zheng Ci Chi, 鄭慈持
Ci Nian An Temple, 慈念庵	1930s	Liang Dayi, 梁达意
Du Shan An Temple, 度善庵	1942	Liang Dashi, 梁达施 (Hui Guan, 慧觀)
Ci Jing An Temple, 慈淨庵/Cijing Jingshe, 慈淨精舍	1947	Hu Dazhuan, 胡達轉 Huang Dayou, 黃達有 Chen DaLing, 陳達玲
Ci Yun Foo Tang, 慈雲佛堂/CI Yun An, 慈雲庵	1940s	Guan Dahua, 關達華
Sheng Wen An Temple, 聲聞庵	N.A.	N.A.
Ju Lian Yu An, 聚蓮苑	N.A.	Da Jiu, 達就
Zheng Nian An Temple, 正念庵	1921	N.A.
Yuan Jue Lu Temple, 圓覺廬	N.A.	N.A.
Pu Guang Lotus Organization, 普光蓮社	N.A.	N.A.

The continued operation of SGBI was largely contingent upon laywomen's intersecting transregional social networks. As a Buddhist educational institution, the boundary between vegetarian nuns and lay Buddhist women (or between vegetarian halls and Buddhist nunneries) was relatively transparent in SGBI's operations, reflecting the dynamic realm of religious women communities in Singapore. The cofounders of SGBI included Cantonese bhikkhuni such as Sheng Chang (1902–1990), Zhou Ran (?–1968), Jing Liang (1903–1976), and Fa Quan (1915–2010). From the 1930s to 1940s, they obtained ordination in Hong Kong before establishing their nunneries in Singapore (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 205, 233, 266, 279). The historical narrative of SGBI also bears witness to the rise of transnational modernist nuns during the 20th century.

4.2. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore: The Transnational Network of “Scholarly Nuns”

SGBI's establishment and evolution were also linked to the expanding transregional network of modernist bhikkhunis, spanning from Greater China to Southeast Asia, and the transformation of SGBI was largely driven by the coming of “scholarly nuns”¹⁸ since 1965.

Miao Li, 妙理 (1914–1970), originally named Chen Hui, 陳會, was born in Nan Ao County, 南澳縣, a Teochew-speaking district of Guangdong Province. Following her father, Cheng Yuan (澄源), she became part of the clergy at a Chan Buddhism temple called Dieshi Yufo Temple, 疊石玉佛禪寺, and resided at the affiliated nunnery, Jufu Gu An, 聚福古庵. At the age of sixteen, Miao Li received bhikkhuni ordination from Master Xuyun 虛雲 at Yong Quan Temple, Foochow (福州湧泉寺) and subsequently left Guangzhou to study at Tung Lin Kok Yuen in 1935 (Lin 1935, p. 32; Shi 2010, p. 347).

Jue Zhen, 覺真 (1915–1992), on the other hand, was born in Zhongshan County (中山縣), Guangdong, in 1915 and was tonsured at Shao Long An Temple, 紹隆庵. In 1931, she obtained full bhikkhuni ordination at Macau Gongde Lin and enrolled in Tung Lin Kok Yuen in 1936.¹⁹

Due to the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong, Miao Li and Jue Zhen traveled to Penang in 1941 and resided at Penang Poh Oo Toong Temple, 寶譽堂, for a short period of time.²⁰ In 1948, Master Cihang launched the Penang Buddhist Studies Society (*Bingcheng foxue hui*, 檳城佛學會) (Shi 2010, pp. 353–54; Shi 2017, p. 136), where Miao Li and Jue Zhen were invited to provide dharma teachings (Chuk Mor 1960, p. 232).

Miao Li and Jue Zhen relocated to Singapore in 1941. Five years later, they successfully established their first overseas monastery, Zu Lin Temple (紫竹林). The temple, however, was short-lived, and thus, they decided to resume their goal separately.²¹ Eventually, Miao Li established Meow Im Kok Yuen, 妙音覺苑, in Singapore in 1956; Jue Zhen also founded Jue Hui Chan Si Temple, 覺慧禪寺, in Johor, Malaysia (Everlasting Light 1970a).

Miao Li, influenced by her education at Tung Lin Kok Yuen, demonstrated a deep concern for the “woman question” in Buddhism. Miao Li insisted on offering multilingual Buddhist studies courses to female Buddhists at Meow Im Kok Yue, with instruction or irregular dharma talks given by monks. Miao Li invited Yen Pei to give a dharma talk about gender equality during his first visit to Singapore in 1958. During the talk, Yen Pei expressed that, from a monastic standpoint, “gender equality means that both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis are responsible for promoting the Dharma Therefore, gender equality in Buddhism is rooted in Buddhist education”. This statement was greatly appreciated by Miao Li (Yen Pei 1989, pp. 368–69).

Miao Li also aligned with the interpretation of “Human Life Buddhism” (*rensheng fojiao*, 人生佛教) by emphasizing the relevance of Buddhism to modern life and the goal of the “purification of humanity” through the promotion of the Buddha's dharma. She gave a public speech titled *Evil World of Five Turbidities* on Malay Radio at the request of Lee Choon Seng, 李俊承. After explanations of the notions of the “Five Turbidities” (*wuzhuo e'shi*, 五濁惡世), she illustrated the relevance of Buddhism to modern life:

“The so-called ‘Five Turbid Worlds’ are observable in the minds and behavior of modern people; it also occurs in the current tendencies of modern world . . .

[According to Buddhism], the only way to prevent human disasters is to save people's hearts."²²

Miao Li held several key positions within local Buddhist authorities. She was a regular committee member of the SBF, and her temple, Meow Im Kok, was actively involved in local charitable activities under the leadership of the SBF (*Everlasting Light* 1970b, p. 38). Additionally, she served as the chairwoman of the Maha Bodhi School before she became involved in SGBI (Yen Pei 1989, p. 358). Furthermore, Miao Li also contributed to local medical charity by establishing the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic, 新加坡佛教施诊所, in collaboration with Master Hong Chuan, 宏船 (1907–1990), and Changkai, 常凯 (1916–1990), in 1969 (*Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic* 2020, p. 43).

Miaoli and Juezhen could be considered the first generation of scholarly nuns at SGBI. In 1964, as Chen Xinping was preparing to retire from SGBI, Yen Pei recommended the appointment of a female Sangha to the head position for the sake of the school's reputation and teaching quality. He deemed nun Nengdu, who was in Taiwan at the time, as the most suitable candidate for the position (*Jing kai* 1997, p. 227).

Nengdu (1935–), a nun from Foshan City (佛山市), Guangdong, received her tonsure at Shou Yi An Temple, 益壽庵, under the guidance of nun Cheng Zhen, 澄真 (dharma name: Longjing, 隆锦). Cheng Zhen studied at Tung Lin Kok Yuen in 1936, but after the fall of Hong Kong in 1941, she returned to Shou Yi An in Gao Zhou (高州), Guangdong, while Miao Li and Jue Zhen emigrated to Malaysia. Cheng Zhen returned to Tung Lin Kok Yuen in 1945 and spent the subsequent four decades teaching at public Buddhist schools and Buddhist seminaries in Hong Kong (*Shi* 2015a).

Yen Pei recommended Nengdu for the head position at SGBI due to her close relationship with Cheng Zhen, who was a classmate of SGBI's core leaders Jue Zhen and Miao Li. Also, Yen Pei anticipated that Nengdu's Cantonese background would ease her integration into SGBI community (*Jing kai* 1997, p. 227). The decision was indeed consistent with SGBI's territorial characteristics.

Nengdu also enrolled in Tung Lin Kok Yuen in 1959 and assisted in proofreading the periodical *Everlasting Light* (*Wujin deng* 無盡燈) under the direction of Master Chuk Mor. In 1957, Nengdu was sent to Hsinchu Women's Buddhist College, 新竹女眾佛學院, in Taiwan Hsinchu, where she became one of Yen Pei's attendants. It was at this time that Yen Pei's reputation among Taiwan's Buddhist communities had increased since 1952. The bond between Nengdu, Yinshun, and Yen Pei was established due to the friendship between Nengdu's mentor Cheng Zhen and Yen Pei. Cheng Zhen and Yinshun remained acquaintances after Yinshun sought refuge in Hong Kong in the early 1950s. After Master Yinshun arrived in Taiwan, Cheng Zhen maintained contact with his followers, particularly Yen Pei and Xu Ming, 續明 (*Jing kai* 1997, p. 227). After completing her studies at Hsinchu Women's Buddhist College, Nengdu attended Ling Yin Buddhist College, 靈隱佛學院, under the supervision of Master Xu Ming and then studied at Hui Ri Auditorium, 慧日講堂, under the guidance of Yinshun.

Nengdu reflects on her bond with Yinshun and Yen Pei, stating

"In the spring of 1959, I made the decision to further my education at the Hsinchu Women's Buddhist College in Taiwan. My mentor [Cheng Zhen] had a good friendship with the Venerable [Yen Pei], so she wrote to ask if he could look after me Since I was already a monastic when we met, Master [Yen Pei] only gave me a style name "Jing Kai," which implies "misses the mainland and wishes to return in triumph" I studied at Hsinchu Women Buddhist College, where Ven. Yinshun and Ven. Yen Pei was school principal and vice principal respectively. After that, I began to serve as Venerable Yen Pei's attendant"

Yen Pei and Nengdu maintained their connection in Singapore. From 1965 to 1968, Yen Pei taught at SGBI on a regular basis. While he was occupied with the task of the Leng Foong Prajna Temple, Nengdu requested SGBI students to assist in the dharma assembly, group practice, and precept retreat programs (*Jing kai* 1997, p. 227). Furthermore, Nengdu

strengthened the links between SGBI and the Taiwanese bhikkhuni community. In 1969, Nengdu asked her classmate Hui Li, 慧理 (1938–), to teach at SGBI. Hui Li was also born in Taiwan and attended Hsinchu Women's Buddhist College, becoming a Buddhist nun under Master Yinshun in 1957 (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 413–15).

In addition, Nengdu served as editor-in-chief of the *Nanyang Buddhism* periodical from November 1969 to 1984. This Buddhist publication was started by master Hong Chuan and Chang Kai in 1969 (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 430–31). Nengdu actively encouraged students to contribute their own writings to the publication (Liang 1972).

After stepping down from SGBI, Nengdu founded the Buddhist temple Maha-Prajapati Aranya (Ai'dao xiaoyuan, 愛道小苑) with SGBI student nun Jing Cong, 淨聰, in 1971. She also continued to be involved in the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic and set up the Buddha of Medicine Welfare Society (Yaoshi xingyuan hui 藥師行願會) in 1995 (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 293–94).

The head position was undertaken by Kuan Yen 寬嚴 in 1970. Kuan Yen was born in the Philippines, and after finishing a master's degree, she became Samanen under Yen Pei at Leng Foong Prajna Temple in 1969. She was a significant assistant during Yen Pei's "Humanistic Buddhism" mission to Singapore. During Yen Pei's tenure as abbot of the LFPP (1964 to 1979), Kuan Yen was responsible for documenting Yen Pei's sutra teaching, and she was appointed chief teacher at the Chinese Buddhist Sunday School (zhouri xuexiban, 週日學習班) (Leng Foong Prajna Temple 2009, pp. 130–31). Kuan Yen continued to assist in running the Fuhui Lecture Hall (Fuhui jiangtang, 福慧講堂) and Singapore Buddhist Welfare Services after Yen Pei stepped down from the LFPT in 1979 (Yen Pei 1989; Shi et al. 2010, pp. 297–98).

The succession of nun leadership at SGBI was an integral component of the expanding "modern" bhikkhunis network that extended from Hong Kong and post-war Taiwan to Southeast Asia. These female individuals, who had been trained in the Buddhist monastic education system, were influenced by Yishun's paradigm of "Humanistic Buddhism," and as modernist bhikkhunis, they claimed the new role of "religious teacher" as opposed to ritualistic, transitional clergy (Chern 2000; Li 2022, p. 5).

In 1972, nun Xian Xiang, 賢祥, assumed the leadership of the institution. Xian Xiang was part of the first batch of graduates and was joined by other SGBI alumnae such as Chen Ru Kun, 陳如堃; nun Xian Tong, 賢通; and Xian Can, 賢參, who returned to serve as faculty. They were among the new generation of Buddhist women nurtured by SGBI, and they also witnessed the eventual shutdown of the seminary (Shi et al. 2010, p. 414).

5. Short-Lived, Long Impact

In 1975, SGBI announced the cessation of its operations, yet its campus persisted. In 1979, subsequent to his departure from Ling Feng Prajna Lecture Hall, Master Yen Pei temporarily relocated to SGBI, responding to an invitation by Hui Yuan (Lin Dajian) to partake in SGBI's trust. However, this proposition was ultimately abandoned due to a lack of support (Yen Pei 1989, pp. 494–95). Despite efforts to revitalize the seminary, including hosting an "Evening Buddhist Class for Youth" (yejian qingnian foxue ban, 夜間青年佛學班) and attempting to reopen Sunday classes, SGBI was unable to resume operations. Eventually, the estate was transferred to Puji Temple, 普濟寺, in 1984 (Shi et al. 2010, pp. 242, 297–98).

The termination of SGBI was the result of a lack of students. As noted by former SGBI chairman Lin Dajian (Hui Yuan), the primary challenge in establishing a female Buddhist seminary in Singapore was not related to funding, but rather, a lack of student enrollment (Hui Yuan 1972). In 1966, twelve students graduated from the intermediate class, and most proceeded to the advanced level. In 1970, the number of students in the advanced class had decreased to ten, leading to the discontinuation of the advanced program in 1972 (Nanyang Shangbao 1966c; Xingzhou Ribao 1972).

The lack of student enrolment was caused by several interrelated factors. Firstly, the monastic and religious nature of SGBI itself excluded a large portion of the secularized public. Unlike other public Buddhist schools, such as the Maha Bodhi School in Singa-

pore, SGBI remained an independent religious educational institution. As Nengdu acknowledged, while SGBI's curriculum covered the mandatory subjects of primary and secondary schools, it was always centered on Buddhist studies. Thus, SGBI students rarely participated in national high school graduation examination (Nanyang Shangbao 1966b).

The primary source of students for SGBI was always female youths from the vegetarian halls. However, in Singapore, vegetarian halls have also been declining owing to urbanization and modernization. The significance of the vegetarian hall as a refuge for disadvantaged women has been overtaken by the progress of women's liberation, and the tradition of adopting young girls is also gradually diminishing (Show 2018b). Meanwhile, Taiwan has become a leading center for institutional Buddhist women's education due to the success of Taiwanese bhikkhunis (Li 2022). When the "new religious corridor" of Mahayana Buddhism (Tan 2020, p. 96) was established between Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Malay Peninsula, studying abroad became a more attractive option for the new generation of female Buddhists in Singapore and Malaysia.

Despite its short existence, SGBI significantly impacted the growth of Engaged Buddhism and the Buddhist women's community in contemporary Singapore. SGBI played a role in promoting the Buddhistization of local vegetarian halls through education. Due to Miao Li and Nengdu's vital Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic and Buddha of Medicine Welfare Society, SGBI-centered affiliation network remains active in Singapore's Buddhist charities.

For example, Liang Shenghuan, a notable student of SGBI, was adopted by Liang Miao Ming, 梁妙明, a Cantonese *zhaigu* from the "Great Way" vegetarian hall Qingxiu Tang, 清修堂.²³ After graduation, Liang continued to reside in Qingxiu Tang (already known as the "Buddha Hall"). At the same time, she kept close ties with Nengdu and served as a medicine dispenser at the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic (Shi 2015b, pp. 19–20).

Additionally, SGBI-graduated bhikkhunis went on to lead their vegetarian halls and nunneries, as shown in Table 4. Xian Xiang, Wen Zhu, Da Ren, Hui Guang, and Jing Cong also work at the Singapore Buddhist Free Clinic, while Xian Tong, Ji Miao, and Jing Cong also continue to assist Nengdu at the Buddha of Medicine Welfare Society.

Table 4. SGBI-graduated bhikkhunis ¹.

Name	Belonging Lodge	Further Education
Shi Wenjing, 釋文靜	Guan Ci Jing She, 觀慈精舍	Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education, 香港能仁專上學院
Shi Xian Xiang, 釋賢祥	Zi Du An, 自度庵	Taipei Taixu Buddhist College, 台北太虛佛學院 Hsinchu Fuyan Buddhist College, 新竹福嚴佛學院
Shi Xian Can, 釋賢參	Du Shan An, 度善庵	
Shi Xiantong, 釋賢通	Ci Jing Jing She, 慈淨庵	
Shi Xing Jing, 釋性靜	Phor Thay Lan Jiok, 菩提蘭若	
Shi Wen Zhu, 釋文珠	Phor Thay Lan Jiok, 菩提蘭若	

Table 4. Cont.

Name	Belonging Lodge	Further Education
Shi Da Ren, 釋達仁	Meow Im Kok Yuen, 妙音覺苑	
Shi Jing Can, 釋淨燦	Lian Chi Jing, 蓮池精舍	
Shi Lai Hui, 釋來慧	Lian Chi Jing	
Shi Ji Miao, 釋繼妙	Fo Yuan Lin, 佛緣林	Tung Lin Kok Yuen (Hong Kong)
Shi Hui Guang, 釋慧光	Fu Shan An, 福善庵	Hong Kong Nang Yan College of Higher Education
Shi Jing Cong, 釋淨聰	Maha-Prajapati Aranya, 愛道小苑	

¹ Refer to the bibliographies in (Shi et al. 2010; Shi 2013).

6. Conclusions

This thesis endeavors to understand the establishment, development, and transformation of the Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution within a spatiotemporally extended historical background. Drawing upon the dual perspectives of gender and religion, this paper seeks to comprehend how the question of gender politics and modernization intersect within Chinese Buddhist history from Greater China to Southeast Asia.

Spanning various geographical spaces, women contributed to the cross-regional transmission of religious knowledge and experience, and, hence, became a significant part of the diasporic religious network. The history of SGBI not only resonated in the development of Buddhist modernization in the South China Sea but also became a part of a continuous Buddhist women's movement in the twentieth century. Moreover, the religious women communities of SGBI display an interlocking network of affiliation characterized by religious kinship, loyalty to charismatic monks, dialectic regionalism, connections between classmates, and participation in Buddhist organizations and institutes.

The "diaspora" has multiple spatiotemporal concepts with diverse gender experiences, as pointed out by Shelly Chan (2018). If "South China Sea Buddhism" could be considered the "diaspora's dharma" (Chia 2020a, 2020b), it would be necessary to draw more gender perspectives in both transnational and localized historical trajectories.

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Abbreviations

SGBI	Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution
SBF	Singapore Buddhist Federation

Appendix A

Name	Ancestral Origin	Temple/Vegetarian Hall	Establishing Year
Shi Jue Zhen, 釋覺真	Zhong Shan (中山), Guangdong	(Johor) Jue Hui Chan Yuan Temple, 覺慧禪寺	1950s
Pitt Chin Hui, 畢俊輝	Hua Xian (花縣), Guangdong	N.A.	
Wen Zhi Shun, 文智順	N.A.	Phor Thay Lan Jiok, 菩提蘭若	1948
Lin Da Jian, 林達堅	Tong'an (同安), Fujian	Phor Thay Lan Jiok	
Jian Daxian, 簡達賢	Fan Yu (番禺), Guangdong	Tse Tho An Temple, 自度庵	1941
Shi Miao Li, 釋妙理	Nan'ao (南澳), Guangdong	Meow Im Kok Yuen, 妙音覺苑	1956
Chen Xinping, 陳心平	Yong Ding (永定), Fujian	N.A.	N.A.
Li Ci Ling, 李慈靈	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Shi Da Jie, 釋達戒	Shun De (順德), Guangdong	Du Ming An, 度明庵	1930s
Shi Hui Jian, 釋慧堅	Guangdong	Ku Le An, 苦樂庵	1946
Shi Zhuo Ran, 釋焯然	Guangdong	Guan Yi An, 觀意庵	1955
Xu Sheng Yi, 徐聖宜	N.A.	Er Shi Jiu Xiang Guanyin Tang, 二十九巷觀音堂	1920
Yang Mu Zhen, 楊慕貞	Shun De (順德), Guangdong	Taoyuan Fut Tong, 桃園佛堂	1938
Shi Fa Quan, 釋法權 (Zong Pei, 宗培)	Xin Hui (新會), Guangdong	Fa Hua An Temple, 法華庵/Wan Foo Lin, 萬佛林	1952
Shi Jing Liang, 釋淨良	Xinhui (新會), Guangdong	San Bao Tang, 三寶堂	1943
Shi Shengchang, 釋聖昌	Shun De (順德), Guangdong	Ding Xiu An Temple, 定修庵/Da Cheng, Jingshe, 大乘精舍	1930s

Other founders lack information: Shi Yong Zhao, 釋永兆; Shi Puxing, 釋普行; Zeng Ciliu, 曾慈流; Shi Fuqi, 釋溥祺; Chen Shengliu, 陳聖六; Lin Cixian, 林慈仙. This name list came from [Nanyang Shangbao \(1959\)](#). Information in the table refers to biographies in ([Shi 2010, 2013; Shi et al. 2010](#)).

Appendix B

Donor	Donation Amount (\$)	Donor	Donation Amount (\$)
Singapore Buddhist Federation, 新加坡佛教總會	600	The Singapore Buddhist Lodge, 新加坡佛教居士林	600
Phor Thay Lan Jio, 菩提蘭若	500	Tse Tho Aum Temple, 自度庵	500

Donor	Donation Amount (\$)	Donor	Donation Amount (\$)
Ku Le Aum Temple, 苦樂庵	500	KWOK'S BROTHER LIMITED, 郭氏兄弟有限公司	500
Charity Department of Mee Toh School, 彌陀學校慈善部	400	Pu Jue Temple, 普覺寺	300
Leng Foong Prajna Temple, 靈峰般若講堂	200	Meow Im Kok Yuen, 妙音覺苑	100
Shuang Lin Monastery, 雙林寺	100	Leong Wah Temple, 龍華寺	100
San Bao Tang, 三寶堂	100	Fa Huan Aum Temple, 法華庵	100
Master Qingchan. 清禪法師	100	Master Yen Pei. 演培法師	100
Master Jinghong. 淨泓法師	100	Master Jinghong, 一真法界	100
Robert Kuok Hock Nien, 郭鶴年	100	Philip Kuok Hock Khee, 郭鶴舉	100
Zhu Fengcai, 朱鳳彩	100	Tong Xian Tng Temple, 同善堂	100
Luo Jia Zhao, 羅加兆	100	Master Yin Shi, 印實法師	100
Chen Jie Bing, 陳潔冰	100	Loke Woh Yuen, 六和園	50
Master Jue Zhen, 覺真法師	50	Master Hui Cheng, 慧成法師	50
Master Hui Yuan, 慧圓法師	50	Chen Xin Yue, 陳心月	50
Fa Shi Lin, 法施林	40	Ju Lian Yuan, 聚蓮苑	30
Ci Nian Aum Temple, 慈念庵	20	Yuan Jue Lu, 圓覺廬	20
Du Shan Aum Temple, 度善庵	20	Da Cheng Aum Temple, 大乘庵	20
Yin Jue Xing, 隱性覺	20	Lian Chi Ge, 蓮池閣	20
The Man Fut Tong Nursing Home, 萬佛堂安老院	20	Mei Xin Xue, 梅心雪	20
Tang Yue Yun, 湯月雲	20	Wen Zhi Soon, 文智順	20
Kwun Yum Foo Tang, 慈雲佛堂	10	Luo Song Sheng, 羅頌昇	10
Ci Jing Aum Temple, 慈淨庵	10		

The content of the table is a list of donors who contributed funds to SGBI in 1971. The information was obtained from a form released in *Nanyang Fojiao* (Nanyang Fojiao 1972).

Appendix C

Year	Organizations
1960 and 1966	Cantonese Meow Im Kok Yuen, 妙音覺苑; Jue Hui Chan Yuan Temple, 覺慧禪院; Ku Le Aum Temple, 苦樂庵; Buddhist Studies Organization, 佛學研究院 (Guan ci jingshe, 觀慈精舍); Ju Lian Yuan, 聚蓮苑; Ci Jing Aum Temple, 慈淨庵; Pu Fu Tang, 普福堂; Ci Nian Aum Temple, 慈念庵 (Cijing jingshe, 慈淨精舍); Du Ming Aum Temple, 度明庵; Fa Hua Aum Temple, 法華庵 (Man Fut Lin Temple, 萬佛林)、Yuan Jue Lu Temple, 圓覺廬 (Yuan Jue Temple, 圓覺廟); Pu Guang Lotus Organization, 普光蓮社 Non-Cantonese/undialectical/unknown Phor Thay Lan Jiok, 菩提蘭若; Qing De Si Temple, 清德寺; Lian Chi Ge Temple, 蓮池閣; Tien Zhu Shan, 天竺山 (Beeh Low See Temple, 昆廬寺)
Only in 1960	Cantonese Tse Tho Aum Temple, 自度庵; Bohdi Lin, 菩提林; Du Shan Aum Temple, 度善庵 Cantonese or un-identified Por Tay School, 菩提學校; Kuan Yin Aum, 觀音庵; Loke Woh Yuen, 六和園; Bodhi Vihara, 菩提精舍
Only in 1966	Cantonese Foo Hai Chan Monastery, 福海禪寺; Ru Shi Wo Wen, 如是我聞; Ding Xiu Aum Temple, 定修庵; Yin Xing Jue, 隱性覺; San Bao Aum Temple, 三寶堂; Da Bei Yuan, 大悲院; Zheng Nian Aum Temple, 正念庵; Sheng Wen Aum Temple, 聲聞庵; Guan Ci Vihara, 觀慈精舍; Guan Yi Ann, 觀意庵; Lian Chi Ci Vihara, 蓮池精舍; Man Foo Tang, 萬佛堂; Ci Yun Foo Tang, 慈雲佛堂; Por Tay Fo Yuan, 菩提佛院 Non-Cantonese/undialectical/unknown Fa Shi Lin, 法施林; Nanyang Buddhist Studies Book Store, 南洋佛學書局; Leng Feng Phor Tay School, 靈峰菩提學院

Notes

- Holmes Welch (1968, pp. 103–20) uses the term “seminary” to differentiate the “new” modern Buddhist school from the conventional “Vinaya school”. Although Travagnin (2017, pp. 229–31) acknowledges the ambiguity of Welch’s old-and-new binary, the phrase “Buddhist seminary” has been widely adopted as a reference to the educational institutions that emerged as a part of the modern Chinese Buddhist revival movement. Most of these seminaries, as described, were primarily intended for the training of Sangha (although they also accepted laity). Given the monastic, doctrinal, and intellectual implication of this term, this paper employs “seminary” to differentiate it from secularized public “Buddhist schools”.
- The Chinese rendition of “vegetarian nuns” varies based on the dialect group (Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, or Teochew), religious tradition strategies, and self-identification. The commonly used Chinese terms for this woman’s religious group include “zhaigu, 齋姑” or “zhaijie, 齋姐”. In the Hokkien-speaking region, they may also be referred to as “caigu, 菜姑”. Some Buddhist-inclined vegetarian nuns would tend to be regarded as “lay Buddhists” (*jushi*, 居士), distinguishing themselves from the sectarian traditions of the Way of Former Heaven (*xiantiandaom* 先天道). This paper will use the term “vegetarian nuns” in the absence of a specific context, as seen in the works of Topley (1963, 1978) and Show (2020a, 2021).
- Yang Wenhui conducted a diligent examination of published Buddhist canons to highlight the achievements of Buddhist women. He advocated for the promotion of equal opportunities for women in “new” Buddhist education. His initial curriculum designs for nuns’ education served as the foundation of woman’s Buddhist educational institutions throughout the Republican period (He 1997, pp. 204–5; DeVido 2015, pp. 75–77).
- The first wife of Ho Tong was the cousin of Ching Lin Kok, Margaret Mak Sau Ying, 麥秀英 (Lady Margaret Ho Tung) (Cheng 1976, pp. 1–5).
- In 1925, Zhang Tao Bo (1868–1945) renovated his property in Macau into a Buddhist lodge for women and renamed it “Merit Forest” (Gong De Lin). In 1932, Zhang became a monk with the dharma name Guan Ben, 觀本 (He 1999a).
- 「尼恆寶主辦之菩提精舍, 漢口尼德融主辦之八敬學院; 而女居士尤以創立香港東蓮覺苑之張蓮覺, 主辦奉化法昌學院之張聖慧, 主持無錫佛學會過聖嚴為傑出」 Translated by the author from (Taixu 1940).

- 7 「我對女佛徒，只勸在家學勝鬘等，不令依聲聞律出家，亦因不契時機，於法於人兩無益也，婦女應多學佛，但切勿出家為尼」 Translated by the author from [Jiang \(1943\)](#).
- 8 Names and addresses of students retrieved from [\(Lin 1935, pp. 31–32\)](#).
- 9 Chen Kuanzong (dharma name: Huichi, 慧持) was born to a Teochew merchant family in Indonesia; she converted to Buddhism under Fang Lian at the age of thirty-two ([Shi 2010, p. 344](#)).
- 10 At the time, Ong was teaching at the Penang Hokkien Girls' School (*Bingcheng fujian nüxiao* 檳城福建女校). Her first encounter with Fang Lian took place in 1933, when Fang Lian led her female disciples on a trip to Burma. Ong had taught at the Yangon Chinese Girls' Public School before she moved to Penang ([Hue 2020, pp. 298–99](#)). The meeting between Ong and Fang Lian occurred at the Yangon Chinese Buddhist Association, which was established by Master Cihang in 1929 ([Por Tay School 1947, p. 9](#)).
- 11 Lee Choon Seng is a prominent lay Buddhist philanthropist. He used to be the chairman of the Singapore Buddhist Federation (SBF). For more about Lee, see ([Hue et al. 2022](#)).
- 12 The lyrics of the school anthem were composed by Master Chuk Mor ([Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution 1970](#)) and roughly translated by the author: "The Lion City, the city renowned for its beauty in the South Sea, is an ideal location for spreading Buddha's teachings. Loving-Kindness-Compassion-Joy- Equanimity, we Buddhist students shall not forget Buddha's teaching. Upholding filial piety toward our parents, respecting our teachers, fostering harmony with our friends, and cherishing our fellows, we gather here with great joy. Persevere in your studies, do not hesitate. May you achieve great success and bring honor to Buddhist women in Singapore."
- 13 「優婆夷教育，首先要注重能處理家事的家庭教育，造成此種優婆夷人才，將來便可使他們家庭佛化 ... 造成佛化家庭的因素，是在家學佛的佛女」 Translated by the author from ([Taixu 1936, pp. 7–8](#)).
- 14 「家庭之權利，大半操於婦女之掌握，若能藉主婦之地位推行佛化家庭，俾其子女皆得受佛學之薰陶，啟迪人類之真正智慧 ... 以此整飭人心，而維社會之安寧，世界之和平，是故女子佛學院之創設，實為時代之需要者」 Translated by the author from ([Singapore Girls' Buddhist Institution 1967, p. 1](#)).
- 15 「它要培養出一批對佛教具有正確認識而又獻身於佛教的弘法青年，讓他們向眾生宣揚佛理，去除迷信因素，讓佛教重光」 Translated by the author from Nanyang Shangbao 1968b.
- 16 When Master Cihang launched the Penang Buddhist Studies Society at Poh Oo Toong Temple, 寶譽堂, Chen Xinping became one of the committee members with other women from the Penang Por Tay School, including Ong Long Soo, Chen Kuanzong, and Chen Shaoying. The registration archives refer to ([Shi 2017, pp. 136–37](#)).
- 17 Jian Daxian (1912–1994), also called Jian Huizhu, 簡慧珠. She was born in Guangdong and moved to Singapore in 1932. She became a disciple of Master Zongrao in 1940 and built her vegetarian hall, Tse Tho An Temple, 自度庵, with a Cantonese nun called Daren, 達仁, in 1941 ([Shi et al. 2010, pp. 220–23](#); [Shi 2010, p. 350](#)). For more information about the two vegetarian restaurants, see Tan 2022.
- 18 The term "scholarly nun" has been applied in Li Yuzhen's research on contemporary Taiwanese nuns, referring to nuns with a bachelor's degree or higher ([Li 2005a, 2022](#)). In this paper, the term "scholarly nun" was also adopted in line with Chia's "scholar-monk" ([Chia 2020a](#)), which refers to clergy (Yen Pei) who have received a systematic Buddhist education in modern Buddhist seminaries and are dedicated to promoting of Buddhist education and scholarship.
- 19 The bibliographic information on Jue Zhen can be found in her obituary in 1992. The obituary mentioned that Jue Zhen obtained full bhikkhuni ordination under Master Dajue, 大覺, in 1932 ([Lianhe Zaobao 1992](#)). Given that Dajue passed away in 1925, it is possible that the obituary made an error. The monk in question may be Master Daxing, 大醒, another student of Taixu who left Xiamen for Guangdong Province in 1932 ([Yinshun 1953, p. 22](#)).
- 20 Poh Oo Toong was founded by Khoo Soo Yu, 邱素譽, in 1938. It was constructed with donations from Khoo's wealthy merchant husband, Yang Zhangcheng, 楊章成, and assistance from the vegetarian nun Low Kin Kng, 劉根泳.
- 21 The information was obtained through the materials collected by [Shi \(2017, p. 534\)](#) and the author's interview with Shi Baoning, 釋寶寧, at Meow Im Kok Yuen on 18 August 2021. Information regarding Zi Zhu Lin Temple is limited, and Master Bao Ning did not provide a further explanation of its closure.
- 22 「我們看現代人的思想和行為，再看現在世界的現象趨勢，是不是確符合這種所謂“五濁惡世” ... [依佛法來講] 我們想要挽救人類災難，就必須先拯救人心」 Translated by the author from ([Nanyang Shangbao 1957](#)).
- 23 Liang Shengwan mentioned her "adoptive mother" as a "zhai gu, 齋姑", but the name of Liang Mingmiao has not been disclosed ([Liang 2013, p. 25](#)). Additional information in this paper has been gleaned from the obituary of Liang Mingmiao in ([Lianhe Zaobao 1991](#)). The information about Qingxiu Tang is limited. However, in Liang Shengwan's article, the photograph of Liang Miaoming provides some hints, as she is depicted wearing the traditional attire of the Dongling lineage, consisting of a white blouse and black pants ([Show 2018a; 2018b, p. 54](#)).

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