Daughters of the Buddha, Inherited and Acquired,

on Canadian Soil - An Oral History

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1. Introduction

Buddhism has had a presence of over 100 years in Canada when the first Japanese Buddhist Church\(^1\) was established in 1905 in British Columbia\(^2\) in Western Canada. However its flowering had its beginnings only in the early fifties primarily in the context of Toronto, and Montreal in Eastern Canada\(^3\).

While the Sangha leadership in Canada, as in traditional homelands, has been firmly in the hands of monks, one of the healthiest developments in Canadian Buddhism beginning with the flowering has been the active participation of women, both Lay and Ordained, and from among the ranks of both what I have come to characterize as Inherited Buddhists and Acquired Buddhists\(^4\). There is but a single publication exclusively on Canadian Buddhist women that the author is aware of, namely *Lotus Petals in the Snow* (2015)\(^5\). However, the very first Bhikkhuni to be written about is Kwang Ok Sunim of Bul Gwang Sa, featured in *Thus Spake the Sangha: Early Buddhist Leadership in Toronto* (2008), where she talks about her life in Korea and Canada\(^6\).

This short article, it may be noted, is an Oral History, based in my limited experience of women leaders encountered during my three decades plus leadership in Canadian Buddhism\(^7\). However, it is only a listing, rather than a comprehensive study. While much of it is from memory, I have given references where possible. But it is hoped that it will provide a sketch of footprints in the sands of Canadian Buddhism, beginning in the 1980’s up to the present day (2017).

We begin with the Lay leadership, then go on to the Ordained, the ordering being not only reflective of my own experience - it was the Lay leaders I met first, but also of the Canadian reality. I have sought to list them chronologically as much as possible in terms of my own encounters, but not necessarily their involvement in Buddhism, here in Canada or elsewhere. In any case, it is not always easy to know just exactly when a given leader Daughter appears on the Buddhist screen.

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\(^1\) The term ‘Church’ was used by way of social compliance way back a century when in Canada, Japanese were seen as ‘enemy aliens’. While the label was used for a whole century, in moving to a new Headquarters on Sheppard Ave in Toronto, it has been changed to ‘Toronto Buddhist Temple’.

\(^2\) Watada, 1996.

\(^3\) Personal knowledge.

\(^4\) See later for a brief characterization.


\(^6\) Sugunasiri, Ed., 2008, pp. 71-90. Kwang Ok Sunim is one of five Sangha leaders in Toronto, the earliest, interviewed by the writer for the Multicultural History Society of Ontario in the 1980’s (see MHSO Archives for the originals). The other four are Bhante Punnaji, Samu Sunim, Tsunoda Sensei and Zasep Tulku Rinpoche.

\(^7\) See Hori & McLellan, 2012, for an essay.
2. Lay Women Leadership

We begin with the Toronto Mahavihara, where, beginning in the late seventies, such leadership came from Sumithra Peeris, a medical doctor, with the active support of her husband, an engineer. Even though they made their home a couple of hours from Toronto, you could be sure to see them at every temple event. Another providing leadership during this early stage was Irene Pandithasekara, a teacher, who held the position of Secretary during my time as Co-Vice President. A more recent from the Sinhala Canadian community to provide more than active leadership is Chandra de Silva, a successful businesswoman. While there were already three Sinhala Buddhist temples in the Toronto Area – Southeast, Southwest and Northwest, Chandra came to be the initiator and sponsor of the Mahamevnawa Buddhist monastery, aka Buddha Meditation Centre of Greater Toronto in the suburb of Markham, to the North of Toronto. In her quiet way, she started from scratch, from buying the land to inviting the monks from Sri Lanka. Mahamevnawa is different from the other three in that its focus is primarily meditation.

Among the earliest Inherited Buddhist Women leaders outside of the Sinhala community that I came into contact with was the Burmese Buddhist Rosemarie Than, this even before the Burmese Mahadhammika Buddhist Temple had opened its doors. I ran into her at a store when, sensing that she, who was with her husband, was of Burmese origin, I approached her and introduced myself. She served as the Secretary of the Buddhist Council of Canada when I was President. Active in the Vietnamese Temple community of Hoa Ngiem at the time were several women. One of them was Kim Nguyen, who with a background in Accounting, served as Treasurer on the Board of Directors at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies (2000 +). Unconnected with any other Buddhist group, but providing leadership as President of SGI Canada was Elizabeth Izumi, when I met her at the opening of a Centre north of Toronto. Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a Buddhist association, with a membership of 12 million members in 192 countries and territories, based on the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, promoting “Peace, Culture & Education”.

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9 Personal knowledge.

10 See <http://mahamevnawa.ca/> for an introduction.

11 One of them can be seen on stage in the historical Vesak photo of 1981. See https://www.google.ca/search?q=sugunasiri+pictures&tbm=isch&to=au&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwisqlJrRtNnAhVL_0oMKHasUAg0OsAQIHIQ&biw=1262&bih=631#imgrc=5hOVVgB2r0ldfM%3A.

12 <http://www.sgicanada.org/>.
If these are all Inherited Buddhists, one of the earliest Acquired Buddhists I had the pleasure of working with was Paula Fins. In organizing our first Wesak in 1981, she represented Zasep Tulku Rinpoche’s Gaden Choling. Another was Kristin Penn whom I would initially meet in Vancouver, travelling as President, Buddhist Council of Canada, to form Chapters. Editor of a Buddhist Magazine13, she was also a participant at the first and only Buddhist Congress held in Toronto in the 1980’s, organized by the Buddhist Council of Canada14. Eileen Swinton, a Buddhist of Tibetan Buddhist persuasion, is perhaps best remembered for the Buddhist bookshop in Toronto she ran for many years. At her retirement party, I was to read my poem, ‘Whirling Sounds’, seeking to catch the vibrancy of the character in the line, “the electricity of your consciousness”15. Another early enthusiast was Janice Priddy who has provided leadership to the Toronto Theravada Buddhist Community16, and who now continues as Treasurer at the Sati Saraniya in Perth, Ontario (see later). I was recently to discover that I had contacted her, in the early eighties, in relation to a TV series the brand new Buddhist Federation of Toronto was launching on Rogers TV Community Channel.

There were also Lay women meditation teachers. One of the earliest is Cecily Kwiat who “discovered Buddhadharma in the turbulent sixties, .. and became a highly skilled meditation teacher”17. Proposed by Prof. Frank Tall (U of T Math), Vice Chair of the Nalanda Board of Governors, who had received guidance from her in meditation, I was happy to invite her to be on the initial Nalanda faculty as instructor in Meditation (in 2000). Molly Swan is another early meditation leader. She “has been engaging in spiritual inquiry and meditation practice since the 1980’s in North America, India, and England, primarily with teachers in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. Since 1997 she has been teaching Insight Meditation retreats as well as mentoring individuals and groups. … [and is] a co-founder and past Guiding Teacher for True North Insight Meditation Centre….”18

Chris Ing began her leadership while still a student at the University of Toronto. I remember meeting her when I was invited by the Buddhist Students Association which she headed, to give a talk on some aspect of Dhamma at the International Student Centre. Fully focused on bringing Buddhism to the Academy, today she can be credited with the successful establishment of the Buddhist Studies Program

13 For some of her current involvements, please visit <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/vbase/sitting.html>.
14 For some details, please visit <http://buddhistcouncil.ca/history.html>.
15 See Sugunasiri, 2006b.
17 McGinnity (Ed.), 2015, 110
18 <http://www.insightmeditationretreats.ca/>.
at New College, University of Toronto, and being the brains behind the Buddhist Educational Foundation which has now begun to offer student financial help, among other benefits.

**Radhika Abeysekera**, a trained Economist, is a modern day Inherited Buddhist teacher from Winnipeg. She provides leadership to the Sinhala community, both in terms of organizing for Dhamma classes for children as well as publishing, including online. I had the pleasant surprise of meeting her on a visit to Winnipeg in relation to Nalanda when I was invited to speak to her group in a Vietnamese temple setting.

Constituting a particularly important group of Daughters of the Buddha are the University Professors and Professionals. It is with pleasure, then, I begin with **Janet McLellan**, Professor at Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. She is the pioneering and the leading Sociologist on Canadian Buddhism. While we have met on different platforms, one of thee earliest is when she and I participated at the ‘Learneds’ - what is now the Canadian Federation for the Humanities. Unconsciously, we seemed to be giving different messages on Buddhism. I was speaking on Buddhist unity, outlining the Principles, and her presentation was on a small Tibetan Community in Windsor, Ontario, rife with internal divisions. So we had to face the question raised by a member of the audience as to how the two could be reconciled. I think we agreed that while I was talking about the ideal, she was talking of the ground level reality in relation to a given community. Her *Many Petals of the Lotus* (1999), is the first formal study of the Buddhist communities in Toronto, covering the Japanese, Tibetan, Vietnamese, Cambodian and Chinese. She would also later serve on the Faculty at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies, founded in 1999. It was to my pleasant surprise that she would later join Prof. Victor Hori, of McGill University, to interview me and do a write up.

Another early Acquired Buddhist scholar, also at Wilfred Laurier University, is **Kay Koppedrayer**, who also served on the Editorial Board of the *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*. **Mavis Fenn**, currently in Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo, was one of those rare Pali

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19 For a brief write-up, please visit <http://www.dhammawiki.com/index.php?title=Radhika_Abeysekera>. Her books are available for free distribution from The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, Taipei, Taiwan. Among her books are *Practising the Dhamma with a View to Nibbana, The Life of the Buddha, Relatives and Disciples of the Buddha, Questions and Answers in Buddhism, vol. 1, Questions and Answers in Buddhism, vol. 2* and *In the Footsteps of the Buddha*.


21 McLellan 1999.

22 See fn. 7.


24 <https://uwaterloo.ca/religious-studies/about/people/mfenn>.
scholars in the early years when she earned her doctorate. I had the pleasure of inviting her to be speaker at one of the Seminars on Buddhism I had organized at Trinity College, University of Toronto, in the 1990’s, when she spoke on “Poverty in the Pali Canon”. Currently, she can be said to be the academic authority in the Canadian branch of Sakyadhita International\textsuperscript{25}, sitting on its Executive as well.

I was to meet Veronique Rasmses when she was a regular at the Trinity Seminars. Later Professor at York University, she would also serve on the Board of Directors at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies and also on the Faculty, teaching Meditation. Later I was to invite her to lead the 10 part series on Buddhism on Omni TV\textsuperscript{26}. Frances Garrett, a Tibetan scholar, of University of Toronto, was the first faculty member to be hired around the turn of the century, following a period during which Buddhist studies had almost died out\textsuperscript{27}, serving also on the Board of Editors of the Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies (CJBS hereafter). Immigrating from the US, I had the pleasure of welcoming her to Canada and inviting her for a meal.

I was to encounter Angela Sumegi, of Carleton University, when she kindly agreed to serve as Editor of the Pativedha Section\textsuperscript{28} of CJBS. She would also be a contributor, beginning with her piece, “Buddhism in Ottawa?”\textsuperscript{29}. My first encounter with Terry Woo, one time Buddhist Chaplain at Dalhousie University, was when I invited her to make a presentation on Daoism to my Christian students taking a course, “Dynamics of Interfaith”, at Trinity College. The course focused on how the different religions are expressions of spirituality, taking the students beyond the recognized World religions. Later she was to contribute to the CJBS as well\textsuperscript{30}.

It was on a visit to the University of Calgary promoting Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies (NCBS hereafter) that I was welcomed by Wendy L Adamek, Chair of Religious Studies. Later in 2013, she would become the Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies. My contact with Sarah Haynes, currently at West Illinois University, was when she kindly wrote an appreciation of the late Prof. Leslie Kawamura\textsuperscript{31}, her Professor at the University of Calgary. Although she continues to teach in the US, her


\textsuperscript{26} For more information, please visit <https://ca.linkedin.com/in/tomaszef>.

\textsuperscript{27} This was following the retirement of renowned scholars such as Professors Warder and Leonard Priestley, who were also my Professors earning a Master’s in the Scientific Study of Buddhism.

\textsuperscript{28} The articles in the journal was organized along the tripartite division of pariyatti (theory), patipatti (application) and pativedha (praxis), drawing upon a traditional division. See Sugunasiri, 2005, 2-3.


\textsuperscript{30} Woo, CJBS, 2005, 111-123.

\textsuperscript{31} Haynes, CJBS, 2011, 7-8.
article in *Flowers on the Rock* (2016)\(^{32}\) shows her continuing interest in Canadian Buddhism. While I was to first encounter **Jessica Main**, currently on the faculty at the University of British Columbia, as a contributor to CJBS, it was my pleasure to meet her in Toronto when she attended a conference, and when we talked about her possible involvement in an Editorial capacity of the Journal. **Amanda Goodman**, of University of Toronto, specializing in Chinese Buddhism, I have only met once, and only informally, at a reception for a colleague when he earned his doctorate. Cross-appointed in the Department for the Study of Religion and the Department of East Asian Studies, her research focuses on the formative Tang-Song transition period of Chinese Buddhism, and specifically the Chinese esoteric or tantric Buddhist tradition\(^{33}\).

While **Kim Beek**’s leadership is not strictly in the religious sense, her creative initiative has been to add a literary dimension. A Captain in the Army, and a PhD candidate in the Religious Studies Department at McMaster University in Hamilton when I first encountered her, although only via email, she was to set up a Buddhist Fiction Blog, “created to connect with other readers of “Buddhist Fiction” and, hopefully, serve as a space for sharing thoughts about books and short stories of Buddhist fiction, or even about the very idea that a grouping of popular fiction novels and short stories can be labeled Buddhist Fiction”\(^{34}\). I had published my novel, *Untouchable Woman's Odyssey*\(^{35}\) and it was in that context we came to communicate with each other. Later she would kindly publish an interview with me on her blog\(^{36}\).

**Kate Partridge**, a Registered Psychologist practicing in London, Ontario, was one of the Presenters of the Lecture-Seminar Series in 2008 offered by Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies\(^{37}\) Her topic was “Mindfulness Meditation for Stress Reduction”. An Acquired Buddhist I have encountered most recently, is **Jayanta (Shirley Johannesen)**, whom I address as *upāsikā* (Buddhist Lay woman devotee) in my emails (having never met her). Founding President of the Canadian branch of Sakyadhita [Daughters of the Buddha] International, founded in Bodhagaya, India, in 1987\(^{38}\), she can be said to be

\(^{32}\) Haynes, 2014, 287-309.

\(^{33}\) <http://religion.utoronto.ca/people/faculty/amanda-goodman/>.

\(^{34}\) <https://buddhistfictionblog.wordpress.com/about/>.


\(^{37}\) CJBS 2007, 153.

\(^{38}\) Fenn, in McGinnity (Ed.), 2015, 39-48
the only female head of a national level Canadian Buddhist organization.\textsuperscript{39}

**Usha Heer**, CGA\textsuperscript{40}, was a member of one of the families that set up the Ambedkar Mission of Toronto in the late seventies\textsuperscript{41}. An Exec member in her own group, I would later invite her to serve as Treasurer of the Buddhist Council of Canada. **Ramya Weligodapola** was another Inherited Buddhist I would invite to serve on the Board. With the experience of serving, along with her husband, the spiritual needs of prisoners in Sri Lanka, she came with the experience of socially engaged Buddhism.

**Mary Paterson**, a dancer by profession, and a certified Kundalini and Buddhist yoga/meditation instructor\textsuperscript{42}, came to my attention with her publication, *The Monks and Me: How 40 Days at Thich Nhat Hanh’s French Guided Me Home*, characterized by Book Reviewer MacRae\textsuperscript{43} as a ‘meditation diary’. The book, with “translations and publications in Holland, France, Germany, Brazil, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Turkey, and China”, is a rare insider expose of life in a meditative setting for a Lay person. **Tanya McGinnity**’s blog, Full Contact Enlightenment, clearly of a religious bent, was what put me in touch with her, electronically as it continues to be. In her own words, she “comes out of Gen X ‘zine culture’ - where self-publishing took the form of Xeroxed booklets from marker-stained fingers of teenaged rabbles looking to raise awareness of racism, environmental destruction, animal rights and sexism”\textsuperscript{44}. Interested in Buddhism “since the latter half of the roaring 90’s...” her latest leadership comes in the form of editing a collection of works by Canadian women, titled *Lotus Petals in the snow*\textsuperscript{45}.

**Soo Wong**, Ontario Provincial Member for Parliament for Scarborough-Agincourt, is the first

\textsuperscript{39}Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women is “a global alliance founded at the conclusion of the first International Conference on Buddhist Women, held in Bodhgaya, India, in 1987, under the patronage of the Dalai Lama. The initiative for the conference came from the German nun Ayya Khema; the American nun Karma Lekshe Tsomo; and the Thai professor Chatsumarn Kabilsingh (now Bhikkhuni Dhammananda).” <http://sakyadhita.org/home/ourhistory.html>. This was the organization behind the revival of the Bhikkhuni Ordination, with backing from Sri Lanka monks Mapalagama Vipulasara, Secretary, Mahabodhi Society of India, and Ven. Piyananda of the Los Angeles, California. The Dalai Lama holding the first ordination in 1998 in Buddhaagaya, India. Dr Kusuma Devendra of Sri Lanka, among others, got her ordination under the name of Bhikkhuni Kusuma. “Bhikkhuni Kusuma is the first woman in Sri Lanka to don the robes of a Bhikkuni after a lapse of the Bhikkhuni order for nearly 1,000 years” <http://sakyadhita.org/home/exec.html#founding>. See also <http://thubtenchodron.org/2007/09/full-ordination-women-restore/>.

\textsuperscript{40}See <https://ca.linkedin.com/in/usaha-heer-cpa-cga-131a0910>.

\textsuperscript{41}Heer, in McGinnity (Ed.), 2015, 62.

\textsuperscript{42}“I also have extensive training in classical ballet, and have performed in theatre and film with such luminaries as the principal dancers from The National Ballet of Canada and the internationally celebrated author, Michael Ondaatje.” <https://www.marypaterson.ca/about-mary/>.

\textsuperscript{43}MacRae, 2012, CJBS, 2012, 89-94.

\textsuperscript{44}McGinnity, in McGinnity (Ed.), 2015, 09.

\textsuperscript{45}See CJBS, 2016, for a Review.
elected politician who is Buddhist that I have met in Canada\textsuperscript{46}. I was to meet this Inherited Buddhist at the Buddhism Heritage Day organized at the Ontario Legislature in 2014, on Oct 10 2013, under the leadership of Mississauga MPP Dipika Damerla, and Ven. Dr. Bhante Saranapala of the West End Buddhist Meditation Centre\textsuperscript{47}.

While there are, I am sure, other Lay Inherited and Acquired Buddhists across the country I have met during my travels as President, BCC, or Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies, unfortunately their names have been erased from my ageing memory. So my apologies go to those Daughters of the Buddha whose contributions have found no mention here, although, of course, little does it matter, their contributions speaking for themselves as to the difference made to the communities, and individuals, gaining merit to themselves.

3. Women Sangha Leadership

The first Bhikkhuni Sangha I would meet was \textit{Kwang Ok Sunim}, Ordained in the Korean tradition. While at the time of my interview with her for the Multicultural History Society of Ontario (early 1980’s), there were three Sunims in Toronto, the other two being male\textsuperscript{48}, she was the only one “sent officially” by the Chogye Order\textsuperscript{49}, the other two coming “as private (laughs)\textsuperscript{50}. Three years after coming to Canada, she learned driving\textsuperscript{51}, and was to open her own temple, Bul Gwang Sa\textsuperscript{52}, in the early 80’s\textsuperscript{53}. I remember an Acquired Buddhist male \textit{Upāsaka} devotee fully visibly in charge of the temple gong in the all-Korean congregation. The first Acquired Buddhist female Sangha leaders I would meet was \textit{Sujata} when she came to the first meeting of Buddhists in 1980, with her teacher Samu Sunim of the (now)
Zen Lotus Temple in the Korean tradition. A calligraphy artist, she would do our Poster for the first Vesak 1981. Returning to the Lay life, under her Lay name Linda Klevnik, she has since earned her PhD, and is now working as a Psychology professional. For a short while, she also served as Dean at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies.

**Pema Chodron**\(^{54}\), of the Tibetan Shambala tradition under the leadership of Chogyam Trungpa, came to be a leading hand at its Headquarters in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I was happy to invite her to be the lead speaker at Wesak 1985 which was televised across Canada. It was unique that she would lead us in meditation with eyes open! She was, of course, the most visible of the Sangha leaders at the event, and also high in seniority. So it was my respectful invitation to take her position in the procession by seniority, leading the rest into the hall where the televising took place. But strictly following the Vinaya rules, she took her place as the head of the female Sangha, immediately following the male Sangha that included novices.

Another early Sangha leader is **Anila Kalsang** of the Tibetan tradition, meeting her in the early 1980’s while still a Lay woman by the name of Carol Watt. Her own temple, Tengye Ling, opened in 1990 and is interestingly located at 10 Madison Avenue, Toronto, which was formerly home to the World Conference on Religion for Peace, Canadian Council of Churches and the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, and indeed where my own involvement with the wider Interfaith community began.

**Thay Pho Tinh** is a Vietnamese nun, educated in Canada, and serving in both Montreal Tam Bao Centre and its branch in Toronto, Hoa Ngiem\(^{55}\). I remember meeting her both at the Hoa Nhiem Temple in Toronto as well as at Tam Bao Temple in Montreal when I, as President, Buddhist Council of Canada was looking to set up Chapters.

**Doreen Hamilton** is the first woman to be allowed in as a Jodo Shinsu Minister of the Toronto Buddhist Church. She had had her training in Japan, and was a regular at our Buddhist Federation of Toronto and Buddhist Council of Canada meetings. In fact, she was opposed to having two bodies, in which the membership was practically the same in the initial stage. But the membership disagreed. It was later that I was to discover that she was a poet, too. **Catherine (Rathbun) Jetsun Yeshe**, “A householder, a mother, a wife, a teacher, a friend…”, is the Founder of Friends of the Heart in Toronto, her formal meditation training beginning in 1969. “During this time she took initiation and teaching from the very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche and the Venerable Karma Thinley Rinpoche.” Participating in

\(^{54}\) For a write up, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pema_Ch%C3%B6dr%C3%B6n>.

\(^{55}\) See Soucy, 2014, 333ff. on this Vietnamese nun, his classmate at Concordia University.
my consultations in setting up Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies (1990’s), she had a suggestion for the inclusion of a dance component, understandably, given her background as a dancer, although the proposal was not to be accommodated in the strictly academic college. She is “the author of several booklets and two books: Developing The World Mind, and Clear Heart, Open Mind as well as tapes and CDs. She is working on a third book Waiting for Truffles: Meditations for Daily Living as well as a book of poetry.”56 Whether it was completed before she passed away, I don’t know.

Then there was Sik Thay Shou (I hope I have the name spelt correctly in English), who was in charge of Hong Fa Temple on Bloor Street, a branch of Cham Shan Temple founded by Fashih Sing Hung. While I did not have much personal contact with her, or the library upstairs, I know she facilitated a lot of activities relating to the Buddhist Council of Canada where we had our Head Office for a while. And it was there we had the first, and the only, Buddhist Congress (1985) with national participation57. Calling the temple writing this piece, it was with pleasure that I was to learn that she is at the ripe age of 95.

Fo Guang Shan is a Temple in Mississauga, a City of the Greater Toronto Area, under the leadership of Master Hsing Yun, the founder of the Fo Guang Shan new religious movement called Humanistic Buddhism, as well as the affiliated Buddha's Light International Association. One of his initiatives has been to ensure that the temple (as also the one in Los Angeles, California that I have had the occasion to visit) is run by the Bhikkhunis, making up the total Sangha community at the temple, too. My contact here in Mississauga was with Jue Qian Shih, who appears to be a roving ambassador. Having met her here, I was happy to meet her in Los Angeles, California. And now I understand she is currently at their temple in Boston.

It may be of relevance to note here that, as Chinese chronicles tell us, it was the Sinhala Bhikkhuni Devasara, travelling with five other Bhikkhunis, who had taken the women’s ordination to China circa 430 CE58. That means, then, that while the ordination tradition that has prevailed in China has been developed within the Dharmaguptaka tradition, it is of Theravada origin59.


58 “In China, Ching Chien was the first Chinese woman to request ordination, and received ordination from only the Bhikkhu Sangha. Later in 972 B.E. (about 430 A.D.) the Bhikkhuni Devasara from Sri Lanka was invited along with a group of 10 Bhikkhunis who arrived in Nanking and gave ordination to 300 Chinese women.” The ordination of the Bhikkhunis in China branched out to establish the bhikkhuni Sangha in Korea and East Asia, which has survived until the present day.” <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/wbq15.htm>.

Khin Hla Hla was a self-Ordained Burmese nun, with an MA in Economics. She had garnered enough financial resources to buy a piece of jungle land a few hrs from Toronto where she opened a temple, clearing the jungle, but not always left alone by wild life! She was to kindly serve on the first Board of Directors of Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies. I was also to meet Acquired Buddhist Bhikkhuni Heng Chih, originally American, at the Golden Buddha Monastery, Vancouver, opened in 1983, and also run exclusively by Bhikkhus of the Chinese Tradition.

Another Korean nun to open her own temple in later years was Jung-hye Sunim, a student of ESL at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies, with a beautiful and powerful operatic singing voice. While both she and Kwang Ok Sunim are now back in Korea, what their presence in Canada shows is the respectable position of women Sangha in Korea. Sister Chandrani is a Sinhala lady who has taken to the life of a ‘Ten TP Mother’ (dasasil màtà) making her residence in her family home in Ontario. In later years, I was happy to invite her to make a presentation at Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies.

A more recent Acquired Buddhist Bhikkhuni is Thich Nu Tinh Quang, from Hamilton, Ontario, trained in the Korean and Vietnamese tradition. Su Co, as was her Lay name, “became interested in Zen Buddhism at 6 years old”. Establishing her own temple, Blue Heron Zen Buddhist Centre, she was later to represent Sakyadhita Canada on the Board of the Buddhist Council of Canada.

Canadian born Ayya Medhanandi is Founder of Sati Saraniya, “the first training monastery for Theravada women in Canada”. Though Ordained in early 1980, it was only last year I was to meet her in person, following a retreat in Toronto when I went to donate some books. Her initiation as a dasasil mātā (10-Training Principle Mother) had been in Burma.

The most recent Ordained woman to serve as Minister of the Toronto Buddhist Church, now called Toronto Buddhist Temple after moving to their new premises on Sheppard Avenue is Christina Yanko. It was in 2007 I had first encountered her, a graduate student at the time, writing a Book Review


61 For more details, please visit <http://www.gbm-online.com/english/>.

62 In the Theravada tradition, the general practice for the laity is to observe the 8 Training Principles (aka Precepts) (sikkhàpada), on the Full Moon. But, a layperson, who is looking to devote her full time in Buddhist practice, takes to the 10 Training Principles. See Sugunasiri, 2012, 217-219, for details of the 5, 8 & 10 Training Principles.

63 Thich means Bhikkhu in Vietnamese feminine Nu being the equivalent of –ni in Bhikkhuni.

64 Quang, 2015, 189-191.

65 Jayanta’s interview with Ayya Medhanandi (Jayanta, 2015, 93-102).
of Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism. But later, moving to Toronto as Minister, I would meet her in the context of the Buddhist Council of Canada of which I was by now President.

It is with apologies again that I admit that there may be many an other Bhikkhuni that have not made the list, not for the reason of not encountering them, but through memory failure.

4. Inherited Buddhists and Acquired Buddhists: a Brief Analytical Note

While the list itself may be interesting enough as Oral History, I would now like to add a minor statistical perspective, along two comparative dimensions: Ordained and Lay; Inherited Buddhist and Acquired Buddhist. You may have got some sense of what the labels mean, reading through the material above. But would you kindly allow me to visit briefly the distinction I have made? Thank you.

In Western society are Buddhists of basically two origins. On the one hand are those who have origins in Asian countries and on the other are those of European and/or North American parentage. The latter have come to be characterized by scholars variantly as Euro-Buddhists, White Buddhists, Western Buddhists, North American converts, New Buddhists and the like. By contrast, those of the former category come to be labeled by their ethnocultural origins, such as Sinhala Buddhists, Chinese Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists, etc., but collectively as ‘ethnic Buddhists’. While the geocultural labels may be useful in talking about individual communities or given individuals, they are not inclusive enough to cover every group that falls under each label. While a distinction under labels like Western Buddhist and Ethnic Buddhist may capture each of the groups in broad terms, it has been pointed out that the labels basically, to put it mildly, smack of racism! To characterize Asians as Ethnic-Buddhists, by way of contrasting them with Western Buddhists, is to say that Western Buddhists don’t belong an ethnic group! The distinction also could also insinuate a superiority-inferiority association, given that some of the immigrant communities, as e.g., Burmese, (Hong Kong) Chinese, Sri Lankan, etc., and may have been under a European colonial power such as the British. It is overcome difficulties such as the above that I have come up with the characterization of Inherited Buddhist and Acquired Buddhist.

As implicit in the label, an Inherited Buddhist is one who inherits Buddhism by way of birth, just as skin colour or a language comes to be inherited. While I have no research that establishes it, it

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67 This listing based on the following respective criteria: Sinhala Buddhism being the earliest and the oldest unbroken living Buddhist tradition of 2300 years in the world; Chinese Buddhists are the highest in the world numerically; Tibetan Buddhists are the most visible politically.

is my hypothesis that one’s spiritual orientation, and other values, come to have their beginnings while still in the mother’s womb (nature), governed by her religion or lack thereof. Of course, what direction it takes once born comes to be a function of nurture as well. An Acquired Buddhist, by contrast, is one who has disavowed her/his religion of birth and have sought after, and indeed acquired, Buddhism, later in life. This is as in the same sense of acquiring a skill one did not have at birth - language usage, riding a bike, oratory, meditation, etc.

However, the labels and the characterizations go beyond the first generation. Thus, e.g., the offspring of an Acquired Buddhist would be an Inherited Buddhist, by the fact that she is born to parents who are now Buddhist even though they were not born Buddhist. By contrast is the case of an immigrant Buddhist, or a child of one, who had lost, or disavowed, her/his Buddhism while still in the home country or at the point of emigration, and/or upon arriving in the west, influenced by a materialistic secular society, or perhaps even in the fear that being Buddhist might be in the way of getting ahead in society. However, in adulthood in the case of a child, or after being in the new country, one now embraces, nay acquires, Buddhism, seeing its popularity or out of a ripening of kamma. This person then would be an Acquired Buddhist, and/or not an Inherited Buddhist, despite his/her non-Western ethnic origins, and having Inherited Buddhist parents. So we can see that the labels Inherited Buddhist and Acquired Buddhist cut across generations and ethnicity, and would be valid and relevant generation after generation.

With that understanding, let us now get an overview of the Daughters of the Buddha I have had the pleasure of meeting and/or working with over time along the four dimensions: Ordained vs. Lay; Inherited Buddhist vs. Acquired Buddhist.

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69 See Chamberlain, https://birthpsychology.com/person/david-b-chamberlain for evidence that pains and pleasures are experienced while in the womb itself. Likewise can it be said that the earliest experiences of one’s mother tongue are gained while still in the womb, though it is around age six a child becomes a ‘linguistic adult’. See also Sugunasiri, [Triune Mind, Triune Brain …]

70 E.g., there is research to show that twins raised by different nannies (or adopted parents) speaking different languages come to speak the language of the nannies (or the adopted parents).

71 E.g., I know of at least one Buddhist, who for a long time wore a cross when going out.

72 For a detailed treatment, See Sugunasiri, 2006; now online, <https://www.academia.edu/7498022/Inherited_Buddhists_and_Acquired_Buddhists_2006>. For a more popular treatment, please visit “Sugunasiri weighs in on Vancouver Sun’s “Two Buddhisms” gaffe” in http://www.sumeru-books.com/?s=sugunasiri&tag_s=&category=0&articleauthor=&search_template=1&post_type=post&submit=Search.
Next we provide a rough breakdown in statistical terms (rounded):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ordained</th>
<th>Lay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inherited Buddhists</strong></td>
<td>Sister Chandrani</td>
<td>Radhika Abeysekera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bhikkhuni Khin Hla Hla</td>
<td>Chandra de Silva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jue Qian Shih</td>
<td>Usha Heer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jung-hye Sunim</td>
<td>Chris Ing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sik Thuy Shou Shih</td>
<td>Elizabeth Izumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kwang Ok Sunim</td>
<td>Kim Nguyen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thay Pho Tinh</td>
<td>Irene Pandithasekara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7/49 (14%)</td>
<td>12/49 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acquired Buddhists</strong></td>
<td>9/49 (18%)</td>
<td>21/49 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heng Chih</td>
<td>Wendy L. Adamek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pema Chodron</td>
<td>Kim Beek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doreen Hamilton</td>
<td>Mavis Fenn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anila Kalsang</td>
<td>Paula Fins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Carol Watt)</td>
<td>Frances Garrett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sujata (Linda Klevnick)</td>
<td>Amanda Goodman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ayya Medhanandi</td>
<td>Sarah Haynes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thich Nu Tinh Quang</td>
<td>Jayanta (Shirley Johannesen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christina Yanko</td>
<td>Kay Koppedrayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jetsun Yeshe</td>
<td>Cecily Kwiat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Catherine Rathbun)</td>
<td>Jessica Main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9/49 (18%)</td>
<td>21/49 (43%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To take a brief look at the Chart, we can see that when it comes to Inherited Buddhists, the number of the Ordained are lower than the Lay: 14% to 25%. Likewise when it comes to Acquired Buddhists: 18% to 43%). In general, counting both categories, the Ordained are half the number of the Lay (32% to 68%). Now when we take the totals of each category, the figures show almost double the number of Acquired Buddhists finding themselves active in the public domain than the Inherited Buddhists (61% to 39%). If this shows more of an eagerness on the part of the newly acquired Buddhist, bringing a new energy, it hardly means that Inherited Buddhists have been less active. Their engagements happen to be only within the boundaries of their own communities, something inevitable for the success of the newly arrived groups seeking to adjust to a new environment. When it comes to the lower percentage of the Ordained, this is quite understandable, given that it is the early period of Buddhism in Canada that we are dealing with, the language barrier being no incentive. The size of the congregation can also be said to be a determining factor. Any accidental symbolic value of the number 49? Did not the Buddha, following Enlightenment, spend 49 days, under or in the vicinity of the Bodhi Tree?

5. Another Set of the Daughters of the Buddha

If the above is a presentation of Daughters of the Buddha in Canada in my personal experience, it is with pleasure that we encounter 29 more in three publications, 24 of them in a single publication, Lotus Petals in the Snow, edited by Tanya McGinnity (2015). Featured are, in alpha order, Accountants, Chaplains, Film makers, Lawyers, Librarians, Meditation teachers, Professors, Psychotherapists and Writers. A more recent publication, Choosing Buddhism, edited by Mauro Peressini (2016), introduces us to another three, all Ordained - Kelsang Drenpa, Zengetsu Myokyo and Tsultrim Palmo. Flowers on the Rock (2014), edited by Harding, Hori and Soucy, features seven women scholars, and the life story of an Ordained member, namely Thay Pho Tinh, three of them, and the Ordained, already featured under my list.

Here then is a total list of names that appear in the three publications (excluding those already listed):

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73 While there are five others – Mavis Fenn, Usha Heer, Jayanta, Cecily Kwiat and Thich Nu Tinh Quang, they already figure in my list, and hence not counted.

74 Angela Sumegi, Sarah Haynes, and Mavis Fenn.
We provide below a statistical breakdown of this new group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inherited Buddhists [0 Ordained ; 6 Lay]</th>
<th>Acquired Buddhists [6 Ordained ; 17 Lay]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordained: 0/29 (0%) Lay: 6/29 (21%)</td>
<td>Aryadrishti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anagarika Dhammadinna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Anna Burian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kelsang Drenpa (Christine Ares)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zengetsu Myokyo (Judith McLean);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsultrim Palmo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wmalasara (Valerie Mason-John)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heesoon Bai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thuc Cong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kalsang Dolma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackie Ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackie Larm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynette Genju Monteiro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicole Belanger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Melissa Ann Curley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tracy Franz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ainslie Greig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dianne Harke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Patricia Ivan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Natalie Karneef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carole Leslie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Erin Jien McCarthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julia Milton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kuya Minogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julia Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bonnie Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daryl Lynn Ross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bonnie Ryan-Fisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laura Sugimoto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sarah Truman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| TOTAL | 21% | 79% | 100% |

Combining the two Charts, we get the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inherited Buddhists</th>
<th>Acquired Buddhists</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ordained: 7/78 (9%)</td>
<td>Lay: 18/78 (23 %)</td>
<td>32 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquired Buddhists</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordained: 15/78 (19%)</td>
<td>Lay: 38/78 (49 %)</td>
<td>68 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>(28%)</td>
<td>(72%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is significant in the Combined Chart is that Acquired Buddhists, as reflective of the ethnocultural reality, are better represented in the leadership than are the Inherited Buddhists (68% to 32%). While in both groups the Lay leadership is in the majority compared to the Ordained (72% to 28%), it is encouraging that the latter still constitutes nearly 40% of the Lay total. This is a significant increase when compared to the earliest period – meaning the eighties. If the strength in the number of the Ordained is a sign of how well the roots of Buddhism are being laid in Canadian society, a significant recent development in this direction is the opening of the Theravada Temple for Bhikkunis in Perth, Ontario, under the leadership of Ayya Medhanandi. Another encouraging development is that the Sinhala temple north of Toronto, Mahamevna, is also now in the process of setting up its own Bhikkhuni Centre.

6. Closure

We have above identified a large number of Daughters of the Buddha who have come forward in the furtherance of the Buddhadhamma on Canadian soil. This is also, of course, not to say that there are no other Buddhist women who are active in their own communities, our listing relating only to those who have been in the public eye. But non-identification, of course, doesn’t equal non-existence! That is to say that there are many another Daughter of the Buddha right across the country, who, unknown to us, and unsung, render yeoman services in various contexts. The Tzu Chi Foundation, in British Columbia, is one that readily comes to mind. It was with pleasure that I had the occasion to meet several volunteers, primarily women, during a quick stop over some years ago. Then there is the Fo Kuang Shan, in Mississauga, Ontario, and elsewhere, all run by Bhikkhunis, as is the Golden Buddha Temple in Vancouver. Then there are those who are seeking to shepherd the younger generation, as e.g., the teachers of the Sunday School run by the Toronto Mahavihara in Toronto East, a majority of them women. The list can go on and on. And so, a comprehensive study on Daughters of the Buddha in Canada is awaiting completion.

In closing, it is readily granted that these pages are by no means a critical study but merely a listing. And at best, they may perhaps be a tiny step towards an Oral History. But it may well be seen as an inspirational Pageant of Daughters of the Buddha, Inherited and Acquired, sowing the seeds of Dhamma in the rich niche of the Canadian soil, indeed dedicated to the minimizing of suffering. But could the listing, particularly of the Ordained Sangha, Inherited and Acquired, provide a possible
inspiration for the promotion of aspiration of Canadian women to come forth to go forth? But this could better be encouraged by lifting the words off the pages on to the public square. So it is that I respectfully invite the Daughters of the Buddha to consider holding an annual Daughters of the Buddha Day in Canada.

As one of the highlights, may I suggest a public Bhikkhuni ordination? Arahant Mahinda, introducing the Dhamma to King Devanampiyatissa of Sri Lanka (then Tambapanni), held an ordination under his very eyes, in the presence of his Ministers. One of the Ministers immediately takes to the robes. The next day, sub-Queen Anula seeks ordination, and receives it upon the arrival of Arhant Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta. The Saddhama has lasted in Lanks since then, for an unbroken 2500 years.

Seeking then your kind understanding for my rambling thoughts, it is with gratitude that I, in my fading years, thank the Daughters of the Buddha on Canadian soil, identified here or not, for their continuing contributions. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank those who have helped me sow my few seeds.

Wishing you all the best in health and happiness!

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Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri

Formerly on the Faculty of Divinity, Trinity College, University of Toronto, the writer is Editor of *Thus Spake the Sangha: Early Buddhist Leadership in Toronto* (2008), featuring five of the earliest Sangha Members in Toronto, including the first Bhikkhuni. A long-time spokesperson on Buddhism in Canada, and a biographee in *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada* (2010), he is characterized simply as a ‘Buddhist’, and in *Canadian Who’s Who* as a ‘Multidisciplinologist’. Among his most recent publications are *Triune Mind, Triune Brain: Map of the Mind Through the eyes of Buddhianscience and Westernscience* (2015) and “Devolution and Evolution in the Aggañña Sutta” (2012) (Academia.edu). His “extraordinary first novel”, *Untouchable Woman’s Odyssey*, (2010) has also been hailed as a “Buddhist Pilgrim’s Progress”. Formerly, Canadian Representative on the Editorial Board of NIBWA – Newsletter of the International Buddhist Women’s Association, (Ed: Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), Thailand, (past copies now donated to U of T the New College library), he may be reached at suwanda.sugunasiri@utoronto.ca.