

Women in Buddhism

Introduction

Our received image of Buddhism is a way of life infused with compassion and loving-kindness for all beings, whom we, especially in the West, consider of equal merit. According to stories of the Buddha, his establishment of a female mendicant order supports this image of Buddhism, for women were said to have equal enlightenment potential as males. However, a broad overview of the role of women in Buddhism shows an often-marked disjuncture between that received image and reality in heavily patriarchal Asian societies. In most parts of the world, but especially in Asia, most Buddhist teachers are male, as are the leaders of most Buddhist institutions, all of which is often accompanied by the assumption of the spiritual inferiority of Buddhist women, all estimated 300 million of them.¹ However, as Buddhism spread to the West in the middle of the twentieth century, these patriarchal attitudes encountered the critical and unapologetic scrutiny of the feminist movement.² The result has been a rethinking of the status of women in Buddhism in many places around the world. Although the full equality of women and men throughout Buddhism has not yet been achieved, inequity between the sexes has become a major focus of concern and debate.

This primer reflects on key topics about women in Buddhism, and then asks, As a woman participating in activities at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center have you noticed departures from what you as a woman expect or at least expected? Notes and an extended bibliography are included for those of you who would like to delve more deeply into this critical issue

Women in Buddhism, Past and Present: Topics for Reflection

The issue of women in Buddhism is a topic that has been approached from a variety of perspectives, including history, anthropology, feminism, and theology. Accordingly, the questions that can be asked about women in Buddhism are extensive. Among the most commonly cited concerns are: how Buddhist societies have traditionally viewed women and how Buddhist women have viewed themselves; what role women have traditionally played in the secular and religious life of Buddhist societies, and how that role might be expanded or changed; Buddhist women in the West; women and celibacy; inaccuracies in the history of Buddhist women; Buddhist women and the media; education for Buddhist women; the role of Buddhist women in social welfare; living by the *vinaya* (monastic codes) in the present day; the creation of opportunities for full ordination for Buddhist women; living as a nun in the West; growing up as a Buddhist woman;

and sexual conduct and misconduct. Questions like these address, of course, the issue of gender in religion more broadly than just in Buddhism.

This section reflects on six topics that follow from questions like these: the place of women in classical Buddhism; Buddhist women across cultures; the problem of full ordination for Buddhist women; foraging new paths of life for Buddhist women; feminist deconstruction of Buddhist life; and what it means (or takes) to be a remarkable woman within Buddhism.

The Place of Women in Classical Buddhism

According to classical Buddhist texts, Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's step-mother and aunt, asked the Buddha to affirm the equal potential of women to achieve spiritual enlightenment and to recognize the right of women to wear the robe of a Buddhist mendicant – which he did after some hesitation, for his cultural context was patriarchal Indian society.³ After the Buddha's death, however, earlier modes of gender relations began to reassert themselves around the time written Buddhist literature began to appear. Nonetheless, the order of women renunciates, the Bhiksuni Sangha, has continued to exist in some areas of Asia up to the present day.

The classic model of Buddhism that emerged is referred to as the “two accumulations” or the symbiotic model. In this system male monastic elites engaged full-time in the accumulation of wisdom through study and meditation in a monastic setting, while laywomen earned merit by supporting these elite males. This division of labor was consistent with the view in the India cultural context that the ideal role for women was in the family. Limited by the socially approved roles for women, laywomen were to accumulate merit by tending to the family shrine, keeping the precepts, giving charity to the needy, chanting the sutras, transmitting the Buddha's teachings to children, and making offerings to the male Sangha, among similar efforts. This inferior status for women was occasionally accompanied by negative stereotypes of women in both Theravada and Mahayana texts – and of course to challenge the texts was to call into question their very validity.⁴

But whether those statements are true reflections of the role women played in early Buddhism has been called into question, for there is a conspicuous lack of information on women in Buddhist literature over the last 2100 years. The situation is complicated as well by the widely varying view of women in early Mahayana sutras. In some, a woman transforms herself into a male body upon enlightenment, while in others she achieves enlightenment in a female body. Did males intentionally rewrite the history of Buddhism or were they only focused on writing about the male elite? The answer is not clear. Nonetheless, these conflicting images of women in Buddhism have made the study of women in Buddhism complex and difficult.

It remains true, nonetheless, that an ambivalent attitude toward women persists today in the minds and institutions of Buddhist Asia. As expressed by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, “Historically,

there are at least four areas in which Buddhist women have found obstacles in their spiritual lives. The first area is religious practice, that is lifestyle customs, instructional opportunities, meditational forms, and institutional structures, many of which are routinely available to lay men and monks but are infrequently or never available to lay women and nuns; Second, the disciplinary rules that govern the monastic lives of nuns have clearly delineated them as second-class citizens in relation to monks. The best examples of this are the eight disciplinary rules said to have been laid down by Gotama Buddha. These eight rules, for example, require: all nuns to pay homage to all monks regardless of how senior a nun might be or how junior a monk might be; to be instructed by monks in the teachings and conduct of the tradition but not vice versa; to refrain from criticizing or reprimanding monks though the reverse may happen; and become ordained by the orders of both nuns and monks though the reverse does not happen. Third, although women are, by doctrine, fully capable of experiencing enlightenment, the recognition of that highest experience in terms of title and status has often been withheld from them. For example the Pali term Arhat is often not applied to women, or the term bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism. Finally, female renunciates have at many times in Buddhist history been refused the kind of material support that male renunciates have received.”⁵

Buddhist Women Across Cultures

Surveys of Buddhist women across cultures have shown that women are most likely to be denied admission to the Sangha (monastic life), Buddhism’s most fundamental institution, and are most likely to be discriminated against in Theravada countries like Burma (Myanmar),⁶ Sri Lanka,⁷ and Thailand⁸ in South and Southeast Asia.⁹ Issues include menstrual taboos in some countries that prevent women from entering many Buddhist shrines, the pervasive desire among women to be reborn a man, difficulties in living a celibate religious life, and the fact that many nuns are poor, untrained, uneducated, and neglected. In Southeast Asia, Buddhism in general has been nearly obliterated by war in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, while the life of nuns in Cambodia and Laos are similar to those discussed above; by contrast, Buddhism in Vietnam has endured and is experiencing an energetic revival.¹⁰

The status and role of Mahayana Buddhist women in Taiwan,¹¹ Korea,¹² and Japan¹³ is much more robust than in South and Southeast Asia. Although Dogen (1200-1253) and Nichiren (1222-1282) in Japan both affirmed women’s enlightenment potential, nuns in East Asia still typically assume a subservient position in religious life. The largest community of nuns in Japan today is the Aichi Semmon Nisodo, a convent in Nagoya. Their convent belongs to the Soto Zen school, which is said to have about a thousand nuns altogether. In Korea there are several thousand bhiksuni united through the Korean Bhiksuni Association begun under the leadership of Bhiksuni Hyechan Sunim. The success story for Buddhist women in Asia is Taiwan, which has a

strong Bhiksuni Sangha. There are an estimated five thousand Chinese nuns engaged in Buddhist studies, teaching, and meditation in Taiwan today.

Life for Buddhist women in other areas of Asia varies. In Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, cultural enclaves of Chinese nuns have established temples and perform rituals for lay devotees,¹⁴ while in Tibet the lineage of full ordination for women was apparently not transmitted from India. Though laywomen and nuns distinguished themselves in spiritual practice for centuries in Tibet, their status and role in religious life has declined in recent years.¹⁵ Since the bhiksuni lineage was not transmitted to Tibet, it was not passed on to Mongolia to the north. So until recently, Mongolia was bereft of nuns.¹⁶

Buddhism moved West in increasing numbers of teachers and converts in the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁷ When traditional Asian patterns of patriarchy were brought to the attention of Western Buddhist practitioners, a rousing of feminist awareness occurred that is discussed in later sections of this primer.

The Problematic Nature of Ordination for Buddhist Women

Of the many issues that determine the status of Buddhist women in Asia, the most pressing seem to correlate with ordination status. Coincidentally or not, where full ordination as a bhiksuni is available, the nuns' level of education and status within the society also tends to be high. Where novice ordination as a *sramaneri* is available to nuns, women are recognized as members of the Sangha (the monastic order), even though they are not afforded equal treatment. Without access to full ordination or even novice ordination, women in such Theravadin countries as Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are in a secondary and often subservient role, relative to the monks in the religious sphere. But even those women who have access to some level of ordination are sometimes marginalized and their needs ignored. For example, although women in the Chinese, Korean, and Vietnam traditions enjoy parity in being fully ordained, they hold a clearly subordinate position in the religious power structure of their traditions.

Historically, this situation shifted through time in some countries. For example, around the eleventh century CE, the Bhiksuni Sangha died out in India and Sri Lanka, and as far as is known, was never officially established in Cambodia, Japan, Laos, Mongolia, Thailand, or Tibet. In the fifth century CE, the lineage of fully ordained nuns was transmitted from Sri Lanka to China and subsequently to Korea and Vietnam. The lineage of full ordination for women has flourished in these countries uninterrupted to the present day.¹⁸ However, it remains difficult to determine from the literature just what the status of Buddhist women in the past was, for, as mentioned earlier, that literature is predominantly about men and written by patriarchal men. An interesting objective measure is the number of inscriptions on early monuments like stupas,

temples, gateways, and paving stones made by nuns and laywomen in India.¹⁹ While numerous in the first few centuries CE, they gradually disappear by the 4th and 5th centuries.

However, in recent decades (as we will see in the following two sections), global networking of people who are actively concerned about the role of women in both the past and future of Buddhism is ending centuries of Buddhist women's isolation. For example, a significant number of Sri Lankan women are determined to reestablish the Bhiksuni Sangha in Sri Lanka, not only to recover a lost part of their Buddhist heritage but also to affirm their personal heritage as women. Many Sri Lankans view the eventual reestablishment of an order of fully ordained nuns as inevitable and have begun eliciting support from young, educated Sri Lankan bhiksus (monks) to make it happen.

Forging New Paths of Buddhist Life for Women

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, a very different model of non-monastic lay Buddhism has been in the process of creation among Western Buddhists. In this model, the heart of their involvement in Buddhism is a commitment to the practice of meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings. As a result, many Western Buddhist laywomen in using this model of combining worldly life with serious Buddhist practice, have actually been able to pursue more advanced meditation practices and philosophical studies than do Buddhist nuns in many Asian countries.²⁰ Nonetheless, these developments must be forged in the West and in the modern world, for Buddhism lacks robust models for meaningful lay Buddhist life. Regardless, when lay meditators are at the heart of the Buddhist community, a much more complete version of Buddhism is followed by the average Buddhist, for while generosity is central to Buddhist values, no one would claim that it is sufficient for the full practice of Buddhism. For that, study and practice are also required in most versions of Buddhism. A modern goal of the women's movement in Buddhism, then, is to recover Buddha's original egalitarian approach to enlightenment.

Lay meditation has also become quite important in Buddhist revivals in several Asian countries. However, the issues involved for Buddhist women in Asia are quite different from those in North America. In North America, the prominent issues seem to be environmental, race, sexual exploitation, and social engagement, whether through the performing arts, writing, or direct action.²¹ In Asia, by contrast, the major issues are survival, education, training, and ordination. As a consequence, the task of forging relationships among women who have otherwise had little contact with contemporary women's movements has become a pivotal concern.²²

The contemporary Buddhist women's movement is active in many spheres of life, including: ordination, affiliation, and relation to the Sangha (monastic community); art and

architecture (e.g., the creation of sand mandalas and painting *thangkas*); body and health to support practice better; dancing as dakinis; the practice of ritual to empower nuns; flower arrangement; and prison work, among other activities.²³ In the process, traditional patterns of life for Buddhist women are being broken or transformed, and in many areas of the world monasteries are being replaced in part by meditation centers frequented by lay Buddhists (as at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center).

Feminist Deconstructions of Buddhist Life

As Karma Lekshe Tsomo has argued, “Before Buddhism can be wholeheartedly embraced by Western women, a number of core questions need to be asked, even if they are not easily answered. If Buddhism purports to effect the welfare of all, why has it not been a more active force in righting wrongs against women? If Buddhism is egalitarian, why does the myth of male superiority continue to operate in Buddhist societies? If Buddhist saints were enlightened, why did they not challenge the assertion that good karma leads to a male birth and bad karma leads to a female rebirth? Historically, have fewer women than men achieved enlightenment, and why? Some questions are of immediate concern: Can women come to terms with sexist elements in the traditions, adapting the useful elements and ignoring the discrepancies between rhetoric and reality? Can they transform the tradition, exposing and expunging the unsavory sexist elements? And how is a transformation going to happen when the leaders of various Buddhist traditions are predominantly male, especially if women continue to abdicate authority in favor of men?”²⁴

In the modern world, especially in Western countries, the Buddhist tradition has come under scrutiny in the light of various feminist ideas. Four major issues are: the inferior status of women in Buddhist societies; sexual interpretations of Buddhist texts and tenets; male domination of Buddhist institutions; and the authoritarian role of religious teachers. Besides these issues, the non-monastic model of lay Buddhist life also brings up certain issues that intersect with central feminist concerns. When Western women insist on practicing Buddhism as fully as do men, and when lay Buddhists with families and careers insist that the heart of their involvement in Buddhism is meditation and study, not just donating to others who meditate and study, vast changes are required. Fortunately, feminine thought had already considered related problems in great detail.²⁵

Rita Gross lists seven of these concerns and directions: discarding patriarchal gender roles and adopting more attractive, equitable, and humane alternatives; advocacy that women be economically competent, rather than continuing to rely on men for their maintenance; the unreasonable demand, in terms of time, called for in many professions, that make it almost inimical to self-development; it’s also important to spread the concern for livelihood between the sexes, rather than link gender with responsibility for livelihood; equal sharing between the sexes

in issues of parenthood; and breaking the male monopoly on the introduction of spiritual discipline.²⁶

But the social and cultural factors that affect the future of Western Buddhist women are quite different once again from those that affect Asian women. Western feminist and Buddhism are starting from very different cultural and philosophical understandings of personhood.²⁷ For example, in contrast to the traditional Buddhist emphasis on suffering, impermanence, enlightenment, and happiness in future lives, popular American culture stresses sense pleasures, worldly achievements, immediate gratification, and happiness in this life. American culture encourages self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-worth, whereas most Buddhists view an essentialist concept of self as the root of universal problems. So there is a tension here between East and West.²⁸

In brief summary, if Buddhism is to have global relevance, it must begin to address some pointed questions about gender issues, not only for Western women but for Asian women as well. Buddhism must speak about liberation as not just a distant goal, but as an immanent, accessible social and intellectual freedom. The argument is that feminist perspectives can contribute to these goals. The result of these arguments is a heightened awareness of women's issues around the world, for women have become catalysts for change in all Buddhist traditions. They are forcing teachers and practitioners everywhere to take a new look at old attitudes over women's roles in Buddhism.

Remarkable Buddhist Women

The following list contains the names of a sampling of remarkable Buddhist women who had or are having an impact on the development of Buddhism, either here in the West or in Asia.²⁹ All have profiles on the Web (mostly in Wikipedia). Choose one (or perhaps two with a related or converse interest) and be prepared to give a report on that woman in a classroom situation. Feel free to highlight a woman not on this list. Just what makes the woman you chose a remarkable Buddhist woman? The emphasis here is on Buddhist women involved in the modern women's movement in Buddhism, though a few goddesses and pre-sectarian Buddhist women are included.

Buddhist Goddesses

- **Kwan Lin:** the female counterpart to Avalokitesvara, both bodhisattvas of compassion.
- **Tara:** a female bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism and a female Buddha in Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism).

Pre-sectarian Buddhism

- **Mahapajapati:** step-mother and maternal aunt of the Buddha; the first woman to seek ordination and the first bhikuni.
- **Yasodhara:** Buddha's wife, who became a nun and an Arhat.
- **Sanghamitta:** daughter of emperor Ashoka, said to have brought Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

Theravada

- **Trudy Goodman:** prominent American vipassana (insight or mindfulness meditation) teacher and founder of InsightLA.
- **Sylvia Boorstein:** co-founding teacher at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in California and a senior teacher at the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts.
- **Sharon Salzberg:** a co-founder in 1974 of the Insight Meditation Society at Barre, Massachusetts, which is based in the Theravada Buddhist tradition.
- **Dipa Ma:** an Indian meditation teacher of Theravada Buddhism who was a prominent Buddhist master in Asia (1911-1989).
- **Dhammananda Bhikkhuni:** the first modern Thai woman to receive full ordination as a Theravada bhikkhuni and Abbess of Songdhammakalyani Monastery, the only temple in Thailand where there are bhikkhunis.
- **Ayya Khema:** a German American Buddhist teacher and the first Western woman to become a Theravadin Buddhist nun. She was very active in providing opportunities for women to practice Buddhism by founding several Buddhist centers around the world and by helping coordinate the first ever Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women.

East Asian Traditions

- **Sister Chan Khong:** an expatriate Vietnamese Buddhist nun who worked with Thich Nhat Hanh in starting the Plum Village tradition.
- **Roshi Pat Enkyo O'Hara:** a Soto priest and teacher in the Harada-Yasutani lineage of Zen Buddhism and founder of the Village Zendo in New York.
- **Angel Kyodo Williams:** an ordained Zen priest, author of *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*, and co-author of *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*.
- **Joan Halifax:** An American Zen Buddhist leader who was abbot and guiding teacher of Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a Zen peacemaker community.
- **Cheeg Yen:** a Taiwanese Buddhist nun (bhikkhuni) who founded the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation.
- **Daehaeng:** a popular Korean Buddhist nun who worked for the advancement of Korean nuns and founded the Hanmaum Seon Center.
- **Houn Jivu-Kennett:** a British roshi most famous for having been the first female to be sanctioned by the Soto school of Japan to teach in the West. She founded Shasta Abbey in Mt. Shasta, California.
- **Ruth Fuller Sasaki:** the first foreigner to be a priest of a Rinzai Zen temple in 1958, and the only westerner, and the only woman, yet to be a priest of a Daitoku-ji.
- **Joko Beck:** founded the Ordinary Mind Zen School.
- **Merle Kodo Boyd:** first ever African-American woman to have received Dharma transmission in Zen; she leads the Lincoln Zen Sangha in New Jersey.

Tibetan Tradition

- **Tenzin Palmo:** a Tibetan nun who is changing the role of women in Tibetan Buddhist traditions; founder of the Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery in Himachal Pradesh, India.
- **Pema Chodron:** an American Tibetan Buddhist who is an ordained nun and principle teacher at Gampo Abby in Nova Scotia, Canada.
- **Lama Palden Drolma:** Founding teacher of Sukhasiddhi Foundation in California, a Tibetan Buddhist center; a personal disciple of Suzuki Roshi.
- **Khandro Rinpoche:** a lama in Tibetan Buddhism who was recognized as the reincarnation of the Great Dakini Ugyen Tsomo.

- **Yeshe Tsogyal:** a prominent figure in Tibetan Buddhism (757-817 CE) and a role model for contemporary spiritual practitioners; recognized by some schools of Tibetan Buddhism as a female Buddha.
- **Karma Lekshe Tsomo:** an American nun, University of San Diego professor of Buddhist studies, author of many books on women in Buddhism, founder of Jamyang Foundation and founding member of Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women.
- **Thubten Chodron:** an American Tibetan Buddhist nun and a central figure in reinstating the Tibetan Bhikuni ordination of women.
- **Robina Courtin:** an American Buddhist nun in the Tibetan Buddhist Gelugpa tradition and lineage of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. In 1996 she founded Liberation Prison Project, which she ran until 2009.
- **Ani Choying Drolma:** a Nepalese Buddhist nun and Musician from the Nagi Gompa nunnery in Nepal. She is known in Nepal and throughout the world for bringing many Tibetan Buddhist chants and feast songs to mainstream audiences.

Being a Woman at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center

Using the above discussion as a background, what has been your experience as a woman practitioner at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center? Sort yourselves into groups of three and discuss whatever issues come up. Gather as a group again and join in a group discussion. Have someone write down the main points that come out of that discussion.

Notes

1. For a comprehensive overview of issues concerning women in Buddhism, see Karma Lekshe Tsomo's introduction to her edited book, *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations* (1999a). Also see Anon. (2019), Caplow and Moon (2013), Findly (2000), Harris (1999), Law (1981), Lion's Roar Staff (2019), Tisdale (2007), and Tsomo (1995).
2. Rita Gross's (1993) *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* provides an insightful and in depth overview of the encounter between patriarchal (male dominated) Buddhism and feminism in the West.
3. For stories about early Buddhist women, see Caplow and Moon (2013), Law (1981), Murcott (1991, 2006), Paul (1985), Ray (1979), Schuster (1985), Tisdale (2007), and Weingast (2020).
4. For images of Buddhist women, see Paul and Wilson (1985), Schuster (1985), and Wilson (1996).
5. Tsomo (1999a: 1-44).
6. Burma: Byles (1962), Kawanami (2000), Tsomo (1999a: 9-11)
7. Sri Lanka: Bartholomeusz (1994), Deuraja (1988), Salgado (2000), Tsomo (1999a: 11-13).
8. Thailand: Falk (2000, 2007, Lefferts (2000), Kabil Singh (1991), Tsomo (1999a: 14-1).
9. For the life of Buddhist women in general in Theravada Buddhism, see Appleton (2011). For Buddhist women in India, see Falk (1979), Gutschow (2000), Layman (1976), Ohnuma (2012), Wilson (1996), Schmidt (2000).
10. Tsomo (1999a: 15-16).
11. Taiwan (China): Grant (1997, 2003, 2008, 2017), Schuster (1985), Tsai (1984), Tsomo (1999a: 19-21).
12. Korea: Tsomo (1999a: 18-19).
13. Japan: Aoyama (1991), Arai (1990, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2011), Hirakawa (1992), Ruch (2003), Schireson (2008), Shih (xx), Tsomo (1999a: 16-18).
14. Mongolia, Indonesia, the Philippines: Tsomo (1999a: 21-22).
15. Tibet: Campbell (1996, 2003), Chodron (1999), Kerim (2000), Pinto (1999), Shaw (1994), Willis (2008), Tsomo (1999a: 22).
16. Mongolia: Tsomo (1999a: 22-24).
17. Buddhism Moves West: Batchekor (1994), Chodron (2000), Fields (1992), Humphreys (1997), Tworkov (1994), Tsomo (1999a: 24-26).
18. Tsai (1994).
19. Barnes (2000). Where Mahayana inscriptions are found, there seem to be none made by nuns.

20. According to Rita Gross (1999:277), “the future of Buddhism will increasingly depend on lay, rather than monastic, practitioners and that many of the most interesting and creative developments in Buddhism will initially come from lay Buddhists.”
21. For issues peculiar to American women, see Boucher (1988, 1993, 1998), Chodron (2000), Dresser (1996), Miller et al. (2014), Sanghadevi (1999), Tsomo (1995, Tworikov (1994), Willis (2000).
22. A major step in this direction was taken with the founding of the International Network of Buddhist Women, Sakyadhita, in 1987 in Bodhgaya at the First Conference on Buddhist Nuns, which was organized by Karma Lekse Tsomo, Ven. Jampa Tsedroen, Dr. Chatsumarin Kabilsingh, and ven. Ayya Khema. Their newsletter on international Buddhist women’s activities, Satyadhita Newsletter, is online and a valuable source of information about contemporary activities in the Buddhist women’s movement.
23. For examples, see Kerin (2000), Norton (2000), Wheeler (2000), Arai (2000), Boucher (1988, 1993, 1998), Buie (2000), Chayat (1996), Dresser 91996), Dworin (2000), Tsomo (1999c), Wheeler (1999), Wijayasundara (1999), Zelliott (2000), Collins (1999).
24. Tsomo (1999a: 294-95).
25. According to Rita Gross (1993:127), “Buddhist feminism is a movement that seeks to improve the religious, legal, and social status of women within Buddhism. It is an aspect of feminine theology, which seeks to advance and understand the equality of men and women morally, socially, spiritually, and in leadership from a Buddhist perspective.” She describes Buddhist feminism as “the radical practice of the co-humanity of women and men.” For feminism in general, see Tong and Botts (2018).
26. Gross (1999). Also see Gross (1993, 1996,) Klein (1994, 1999), Langenberg (2017), Masatoshi (2001), Moon 91997), Sanghadevi (1999),
27. Klein (1994, 1998, 1999).
28. See Shneiderman (1999).
29. For a sampling of remarkable women in Buddhism, see Friedman (2000), Ray (1979), Tsomo (2014), Tworikov (1994), Schireson (2008), and Grant (2008). For Buddhist goddesses, see Boucher (1999) for Kwan Lin and the Tara (Buddhism) entry in Wikipedia for Tara.

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To say the least, this is an extensive list of references, though just a sample of the literature. The length of the list signifies the significance of the issue.

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