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# Present

The Voices and Activities of Theravada Buddhist Women

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Photo: Anandajoti Bhikkhu

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## Alliance for Bhikkhunis



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Partnering to support  
fully ordained  
Theravada women



## What is a Bhikkhuni?

A bhikkhuni (Pali) or bhikshuni (Sanskrit) is a fully-ordained woman Buddhist monastic, a female monk. Like their male counterparts, bhikkhunis are ordained by receiving the Vinaya, the text defining monastic discipline.

The bhikkhuni Patimokkha has 311 rules governing conduct, training, and procedural rules. The bhikkhu Patimokkha has 227 rules. The Buddha referred to his teaching as the Dhamma-Vinaya, the teachings and discipline or training.

## Early bhikkhuni history

The Buddha ordained women and praised the attainments of the many enlightened bhikkhunis in his Assembly. By the time of Emperor Asoka (304-232 BCE), the orders of bhikkhus and bhikkhunis were well established in India. He sent his son and daughter to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE to spread Buddhism.

Arahanta Bhikkhuni Sanghamitta, Asoka's daughter, ordained Sri Lankan Queen Anula as well as many other women. Emperor Asoka also sent missionary bhikkhus and bhikkhunis to Southeast Asia. Scholars believe there were many bhikkhunis in the area now known as Thailand and surrounding countries centuries ago.

## Bhikkhunis in Asia

In 429 CE, Sri Lankan Bhikkhuni Devasara traveled to China with a group of bhikkhunis to establish a Bhikkhuni Sangha there. These Sri Lankan bhikkhunis gave higher ordination to more than 300 Chinese nuns at a monastery in Nanjing.

## Protecting bhikkhunis, we protect ourselves and future generations.

A second group followed in 433 CE.

China's bhikkhuni lineage has continued to the present day in an unbroken upasampada (ordination) lineage. This lineage eventually spread to Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam. There are now thousands of Taiwanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese bhikshunis.

## The Loss of the Theravada Bhikkhuni Sangha

About the 11th century CE, the Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sanghas died out in India and Sri Lanka due to invasions, war, and famine. The Bhikkhu Sangha was revived multiple times by Bhikkhu Sanghas in neighboring countries. Sadly, this phenomenon did not happen for Southeast Asian women desiring ordination.

## Bhikkhuni Sangha Revival

In the late 1990's, Theravada women began ordaining, thanks to the efforts of supportive monks and Mahayana

bhikshunis who returned the gift of ordination they had received centuries before from their Theravada sisters.

## Our Mission

Nurture overlapping circles of support and protection for the budding Bhikkhuni Sangha.

## Actions to Achieve our Mission

- Foster dialogue between monastics and the laity.
- Raise funds to support bhikkhunis.
- Educate the laity about the role played by bhikkhunis in preserving the Dhamma.
- Assist established monasteries and partner to create new ones.
- Promote scholarship about women monastics and their history.
- Encourage a gender-balanced approach to Theravada monasticism.



Photo: Anandajoti Bhikkhu, Wat Thepthidaram, Thailand