

Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan

Enlightening Society by
Institutionalizing Buddhist Education

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Bhikṣuṇī Shig Hiuwan¹ (1913–2004) is commemorated in Taiwan for several outstanding accomplishments. She is celebrated as the first Buddhist nun to become a professor, she is honored as a productive and creative painter, and she is memorialized as the founder of the first Buddhist university in Taiwan, where she served as both role model and spiritual mentor for students majoring in science and technology.² Her successful endeavors in multiple roles have forever distinguished her as an extraordinary Buddhist female leader.³ Unlike Buddhist monks whose leadership relies heavily on monastic hierarchy or Buddhist nuns who build their charisma on ascetic practices and philanthropic activities, Hiuwan represents a different set of practices and a unique path of female religiosity. To understand her significance, I first discuss the major events of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan's life and the sources and implications of her popularity. Using her work as an example, my purpose is to examine the formation of female religiosity and leadership as Buddhism interacted with society in postwar Taiwan.

From Lady Yunshan You to Buddhist Nun Hiuwan

Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan was a professor emeritus of Buddhist arts at Chinese Culture University⁴ and president of the Lotus Ashram of Buddhist Women when

she died on October 15, 2004, at the age of ninety-two. Regarded among Buddhist leaders in China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan as the preeminent heir of the Jianan school of art as well as the Buddhist Tiantai lineage, Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan produced many famous Chan paintings and wrote numerous books on subjects that ranged from classical Buddhist philosophy and Tiantai meditation to what she termed "education of enlightenment."⁵ As one of a very small number of Buddhist pioneers, she was instrumental in transforming general college education through Buddhist educational ideals. She effected important changes through her publications, her teaching at various Buddhist institutions, and her founding of Huafan University in 1991.⁶

Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan was born in Guangzhou in the politically pivotal year of 1912. As a young girl, before starting her education in the Confucian classics at age of five, Yunshan You followed her grandmother in chanting the Buddhist *sūtras*. She received most of her Chinese education at home from a female tutor, Shaoyi Liang. Later, she left home to attend a Western-style junior high school and, in 1933, graduated from the Lijing Artist College in Hong Kong. It was during her time at Lijing that Yunshan You met her art master, Jianfu Gao (1879–1951), who was also known as a famous revolutionary and pious Buddhist.⁷ After graduation, she was selected by St. Paulo Girls High School to teach Chinese literature and Chinese painting. After completing her daily tasks at this Christian school, You used all her leisure time to learn about Buddhism at Chonglan Junior High School, whose president was a pious Buddhist woman, and the Buddhist Bodhi Center, which became her home in Hong Kong.

Lady You received a very privileged education, as was typical for young women of elite families at that time. The goal of this type of education was to protect a daughter's virtue as well as to equip her with modern knowledge as befitted a desirable bride. Faith was not necessarily required. However, the learned young women who emerged from this educational system, for instance, Lady Bicheng Lü (1883–1943) and Lady You, subsequently played important roles in introducing Buddhism in English.⁸

Initially, the Sino-Japanese War, which began in 1937, does not seem to have affected Lady You's life. In 1940, she transferred to Lijing Girls High School, where, having been recognized for her distinguished achievement as an artist, she became known as a star of the Lingnan School of painting. During 1941, You began her extensive travels. Following Gao's emphasis on drawing from nature, she visited Guizhou to paint landscapes. She had originally intended to spend only a few weeks there, but after she left Hong Kong in September, the Japanese military suddenly took over Hong Kong and, in October, closed the border. She therefore continued her travels until 1945, journeying through southeastern China to escape the war. She traveled alone, visiting famous Buddhist monasteries and their abbots, such as the Chan

master Xuyun at Nanhua Monastery in Guangdong. She supported herself by selling the paintings she made during the journey. It was so extraordinary for a woman to travel alone at this time in history that she quickly drew the attention of various local newspapers. Because of her established fame as an artist from Hong Kong, her paintings were very popular and usually sold for comparatively high prices. She donated most of the income to local schools. As a woman who dared travel during wartime and exhibited her drawings of local natural scenery in art exhibitions, then generously donated the proceeds to charity, You became a legendary figure from the 1940s until the present day.

At the end of her travels, You learned that her two sisters and father had been killed in the war. It is said that this family tragedy drove her to seek refuge in the Three Jewels in Chengdu with Bhikṣu Changyuan. Bhikṣu Changyuan gave her the Dharma name Longji and predicted she would receive ordination later. You decided not to receive ordination until after fulfilling her dream as an artist. She arrived in Guangzhou in 1945 and took a temporary teaching job at National Third Junior High School for Chinese Immigrants before beginning another great trip in 1948, this time to India, the homeland of Buddhism. She spent one year visiting Buddhist sacred sites in Vietnam and Cambodia, then traveled to India via Singapore. From 1948 to 1951, You taught Chinese painting at the College of Art at Tagore University in Shantiniketan, West Bengal. After going on pilgrimage in India, she went climbing in the Himalayas, where she spent one month painting the mountain scenery.

This great journey did not lead Lady You home again. At the age of thirty-nine, she went to Hong Kong, where she helped educate the children of Chinese refugees. At the same time, she became a teacher at the Buddhist Lotus in the East Institute, the Precious Enlightenment Female High School, and Precious Enlightenment Buddhist Institute. She also founded Cloud's Gate Institute and the Original Spring Publication Company. During this period, Lady You lost her artist master Gao Jianfu but found her Buddhist master Tanxu, the 44th-generation patriarch of Tiantai School.⁹ After the war, many eminent Chinese monks fled to Hong Kong, creating a wonderful place to learn Buddhism. Tanxu moved from Shenyang, a provincial capital in northeastern China, to Hong Kong, and You spent five years there studying the *Lotus Sūtra* and Tiantai meditation under him.

Once Lady You decided to receive ordination from Tanxu, she also decided on education as her future "religious practice" and set out on another trip to collect resources. For three years, starting in 1956, she visited countless schools and universities in thirty-two countries. At her last stop in India, homeland of the Buddha, she shaved her head and received full ordination in Hong Kong the next day. At the age of forty-seven, she became Hiuwan, a disciple of Bhikṣu Tanxu. Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan then promptly established the

Wise Compassion Elementary School and the Spring of Wisdom Elementary School, both of which offered educational opportunities for the children of newly arrived Chinese refugees. Two years later, she founded the Lotus Night School and the Sea of Wisdom High School. She also founded the Hong Kong Association of Culture and Arts and taught Buddhist arts classes on the radio. It is significant that these schools incorporated many elements of pedagogy and educational administration from Christian schools.

Unfortunately, Hiuwan's devotion to education did not succeed in Hong Kong, mostly because of the 1956 riots, when violence perpetrated by pro-KMT civilians against pro-communist civilians seriously threatened the safety of immigrants from mainland China. When she accepted an invitation to teach Buddhist art and culture in Taiwan, she became the first Buddhist nun to become a professor there. At the same time, Bhikṣuṇī Miaoran, the abbess of Dharma Cloud Temple, asked for her help as an honorary mentor in establishing a Buddhist institute for women.¹⁰ Although Dharma Cloud Buddhist Institute lasted only three years, Hiuwan, in response to the request of nuns at Eternal Light Nunnery, went on to found the Lotus Ashram, a Buddhist institute for women, near the Chinese Cultural University in Taipei.¹¹

In accordance with her ideals, Hiuwan refused to become the abbess and to have her own disciples, or to build temples. This meant that she had to support the Lotus Ashram with very limited resources, mostly her teaching salary and her paintings. Beginning in 1974, Hiuwan exhibited her paintings annually in order to raise funds. She also attended many international conferences to spread her ideas about education. By the 1980s, she was probably the most prolific Buddhist scholar producing English conference papers. Her gender and religious identity make this record especially notable. For example, in 1991 she was the special guest speaker of the 2nd Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in Bangkok.¹² After establishing Huafan University, from 1980 to 2002, Hiuwan held a series of twelve International Conferences on Buddhist Education.

The turning point in Hiuwan's career in Taiwan occurred in 1987, when she established Huafan Science and Technology College. She devoted herself to establishing a Buddhist university, because at the time the government only allowed Christian organizations to establish private universities. Even the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China had been unsuccessful. Despite this failure, Hiuwan began to raise funds in 1983, obtained a government permit in 1987, started construction in 1989, and opened the college in 1990. Huafan Science and Technology College was finally recognized as a university in 1997. Thus, the first Buddhist university in Chinese history was established by a poor Buddhist nun at the age of eighty-five.

The Legend of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan

Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan once remarked that her life in Hong Kong and Taiwan had been a journey to "three mountains and two islands" that represented successive stages of her monastic life. Traditionally in Buddhist circles, the term "mountain" refers both to the location of certain religious organizations and also to their lineages. In the case of Hiuwan, the three mountains refer to Mount Dayu in Hong Kong, Mount Yangming in Taipei, and Mount Dalun in Shenkeng, Taiwan. Hiuwan received the Tiantai lineage at Mount Dayu in Hong Kong. It was only when she founded the Lotus Ashram at Mount Yangming in Taiwan, however, that the teachers and students realized she was a Tiantai lineage holder. Later, when Hiuwan founded Huafan University at Mount Dalun, her initiative marked the beginning of secular Buddhist education in Taiwan. These three "mountains" therefore represent stages in Hiuwan's extraordinary religious career as a Buddhist nun and her distinctive devotion to education. The two islands of Hong Kong and Taiwan represent special places of refuge, evolution, and growth for Hiuwan.

Hiuwan's religious career unfolded as she made two world tours with the purpose of investigating education systems around the world. After returning from these tours, she established a number of educational institutes, one after the other, in Hong Kong and Taipei. Most importantly, Hiuwan established a complete education system from elementary school through junior high school, and then high school, college, university, and research institutes. It seems that in the beginning, circa 1945, the blueprint in Hiuwan's mind was of a Western-style education system. Historically, as a British colony, Hong Kong followed the British educational model of encouraging various social groups to establish private schools, a trend that was also encouraged by the surge in immigration from mainland China and consequent shortage of resources in the 1950s. Some might argue that it was this historical precedent that inspired Hiuwan's devotion to public education. However, official policy in Taiwan during the 1970s, which prohibited the establishment of private colleges and universities, did not prevent Hiuwan from looking for an ideal location to establish a private Buddhist university. For me, this raises a question: Why did she ultimately choose to join forces with the modern educational system rather than promote educational reform within the monastic community?

I believe that Hiuwan, because of her personal experience in Christian schools, had a very different concept of "modern Buddhist education" from that of her contemporary Buddhist fellows. Her educational background would have been considered privileged by most Chinese at the beginning of the twentieth century. During her lifetime, most eminent monks received their education in the traditional system of monastic discipline, which

naturally influenced their interpretations of educational reform. The case studies of the four most famous monks in the first half of twentieth century exemplify this. Taixu (1889–1947) conducted an educational revolution within the monastic community.¹³ Yinguang (1861–1940) strictly refined his own practice and that of his lay followers by focusing on chanting the Buddha's name.¹⁴ Hongyi (1880–1942) revised the monastic regulations of the Dharmagupta Vinaya School.¹⁵ Xuyun (1840–1959) revived the tradition of meditation at Chan monasteries.¹⁶ These four eminent monks all promoted traditional Buddhist education but limited their modernizing activities to within the walls of Buddhist monasteries. These male leaders tried very hard to establish Buddhist institutes and "lotus societies" rather than conventional public schools.¹⁷ Indeed, many monasteries had been confiscated by local gentry and governments for the purpose of building Western-style schools. As for lay education, Taixu only went so far as to suggest that monks write novels to attract the youth. In other words, although these monks recognized the necessity of modernizing Buddhist education in the monastic community, they did not move beyond the traditional monastic framework to establish a systematic presentation of Buddhism as part of a lay educational curriculum.

In many ways, Hiuwan's approach was different from that of her male counterparts. She had not been trained in the monastic system, but had received a traditional Confucian education at home and a modern Christian education at school. Moreover, she did not become a Buddhist nun until she was thirty-seven years old. Initially, the educational programs she established were primarily intended for youngsters at general public schools. From her perspective, I suggest, religion can and should play an important role in general education, a perspective that echoes both Confucian and Christian educational philosophies, based on her own experience. Finally, and significantly, Hiuwan had always supported herself as a teacher before she became ordained as a nun. It seems that she was determined to lead an independent, intellectual, and celibate life, an unusual career path for a woman of her day. To some extent, her rejection of monastic roles such as abbess, ordination master, and temple proprietor kept her from fully living a traditional monastic life. Indeed, she never gave up teaching and lived in faculty housing most of her life, even after she became a nun.

During the first half of the twentieth century, it was not difficult to find laywomen like Hiuwan who were active in Buddhist circles. These women had similar backgrounds, usually graduating from Western-style schools, becoming interested in Buddhism during middle age, and, most importantly, being recognized as elites on the basis of their intellectual achievements. These Buddhist women intellectuals were viewed as exceptional because of their superior educational backgrounds and their intellectual endeavors, which included writing and translating Buddhist works and educating Buddhist nuns. These women did not necessarily remain single, however. Though the monastic community

was not overly concerned about their marital status, these elite women generally considered celibate Buddhist monastic life an ideal way for women to live.

It is not yet clear whether Chinese women in those days pursued careers as a result of the inspiration they received from Christian nuns or whether it was simply that job opportunities opened up for them because of the education they had received. However, Hiuwan lived independently as a scholar nun and artist, apart from any monastic community. Considering her role and endeavors in the field of education, Hiuwan's lifestyle seems similar to that of a Christian nun teacher. On the other hand, because of her privileged status in Chinese Buddhism, Hiuwan created a new lifestyle for Buddhist nuns in the Chinese tradition, that is, a class of scholarly nuns and educators who worked for society in general.

In a sense, Hiuwan embodied spiritual freedom through her independence from communal monastic structures. Her journey to the distant sacred homeland of Buddhism during wartime shows her independent spirit; the fact that she learned English and was able to travel around the world indicates her intellectual independence. To learn a foreign language and to travel the world unaccompanied were, at that time, rare and precious experiences for women. Even in the 1990s, Hiuwan's extensive travel experience marked her as a pioneer in Taiwan, including among Buddhist women and nuns. Hiuwan justified these extraordinary personal adventures as religious practice—a noble goal. Her travels played a significant role in constructing the legend of Hiuwan, as did her outstanding educational endeavors.

The legend of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan attracted Taiwanese Buddhist nuns to support her educational programs. In the process, the students of the Lotus Ashram have created a close and efficient network. Even though she was the primary instructor at the Lotus Ashram, Hiuwan usually identified herself as a gardener rather than as a proprietor. She expanded the traditional content of Buddhist teachings considerably; in addition to meditation and monastic regulations, students were required to learn Chan painting, classical Chinese, editing, and news publication and were encouraged to audit advanced classes at the Chinese Culture University where she taught. On the one hand, Hiuwan offered higher education for her students at the Lotus Ashram; on the other hand, she treated them as regular students, not disciples. This approach helped to avoid conflicts between the students and the Buddhist temples that had sent them there to study. Senior members of these temples had no worries that their younger nuns would shift their loyalties from their home temples and original teachers to the Lotus Ashram and Hiuwan, and junior nuns appreciated the opportunity to study at a "college." After graduation, these students and the members of their home temples tended to become followers and supporter of Hiuwan.¹⁸

The Taiwanese nuns who studied and trained at the Lotus Ashram came from small nunneries around the island. After returning to their home tem-

ples, they gathered teams of volunteers who organized fund-raising activities to support Hiuwan's educational endeavors. These nuns were able to accumulate such substantial donations that their activities even affected similar projects organized by much larger Buddhist organizations, such as Foguangshan. Hiuwan's students advised her to give public talks as a means to connect personally with Buddhist followers and to hold auctions of her paintings in order to get higher prices. Most importantly, they urged her to conduct Dharma gatherings and ritual assemblies to raise funds. These nuns made preparations for Hiuwan to appear at their nunneries and took turns donating the income generated by certain ritual assemblies that they conducted at their nunneries to Hiuwan. In addition to fund-raising, the nuns at each nunnery also offered their labor and public relations networks.¹⁹

As the founder of the Huaan University, the first university established by Buddhists in Chinese history, Hiuwan has had extensive influence. She created a model for a Buddhist university that adapted Buddhism in the public schools as a means of spiritual cultivation. In Taiwan in the 1990s, the image of Hiuwan changed in the popular imagination from scholar nun to great educator as a result of her founding of Huaan University. This change indicates the profound effect her commitment to the modernization of both religious and institutional education within the context of Buddhism has had, especially for women.

In this chapter, I have examined Hiuwan's success as a female religious leader who established the first Buddhist university in Taiwan. Because she was able to reach out to the general public through her art and writings, Hiuwan's influence extended far beyond the monastic community. Her philosophy of a modern education that incorporates Buddhist thought and culture, influenced by her own educational experience, created a new ideal for nuns as professional scholars and educators, as well as a new standard for Buddhist education. Her achievements were supported by nuns who were attracted by her independence, insight, and creativity to offer their practical skills in fund raising to fulfill her dreams. In this complex process, Hiuwan and these nuns all received much more than a standard academic education. Their efforts and ideals influenced not only the world of Buddhist education, but also a new generation of public school education in Taiwan.

Notes

1. For a more detailed biography of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan, see Yu-chen Li, "Yunshui buzhu: xiaoyun fashi de biqiuni dianfan" (The Clouds and Rivers Never Ceased: The Paradigm of Bhikṣuṇī Xiaoyun), in Huaan University, ed., *The Anniversary Memorial of Venerable Xiaoyun and the Sixth International Symposium of Tiantai School* (Taipei: Huaan University, 2007), pp. 11–38.

2. This spelling of her name follows the Cantonese usage; it is Xiaoyun in Mandarin.

3. Xing Fuqua, *Taiwanese Buddhism and Buddhist Temples* (Taiwan de fojiao yu fosi) (Taipei: Shangwu, 1991).

4. The Chinese Culture University was established in 1962 as a college and started the first Buddhist institutes in Taiwan by appointing Bhikṣus Yinxun, Xinyun, and Shengyan as chairpersons of the Institute of Indian Cultural Studies and the Institute of Buddhist Cultural Studies from 1977 to 1984. Bhikṣuṇī Xiuwen was invited to teach in the Department of Chinese Culture and Arts and the Department of Philosophy in 1966; later, she was in charge of the Institute of Buddhist Cultural Studies. She retired in 1983.

5. Huaan University follows the educational principles of Bhikṣuṇī Hiuwan, <http://eng.hfu.edu.tw/introduction.html>, accessed February 9, 2013.

6. Xiuhui Chen, *Venerable Xiuwen's Commitment and Innovation to Education* (Xiaoyun fashi de jiaoyu qinghuai yu zhiye) (Taipei: Wanjunlou, 2006).

7. Gao devoted himself to political reform in his youth but could not stand the corruption of his colleagues. Instead, he concentrated his efforts on painting and improving his traditional Chinese ink-painting skills, with influences from Japanese culture. See Wang Dan, *The Biography of Master Jianfu Gao, the Founder of Lingnan Painting School* (Lingnan Huapai Dashi Go Jianfu) (Guangdong: Guangdong Press, 2009).

8. Grace S. Fong, "Alternative Modernities, or a Classical Woman of Modern China: The Challenging Trajectory of Lü Bicheng's (1883–1943) Life and Song Lyrics," *Beyond Tradition and Modernity: Gender, Genre, and Cosmopolitanism in Late Qing China*, edited by Grace S. Fong, Nanxiu Qian, and Harriet Thelma Zurndorfer (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 12–59.

9. For more on the master-disciple relationship between Tanxu and Xiuwen, especially his decision to transmit his Dharma lineage to a nun, which was the first time in history, see Chen Xiuhui, "Huixiao xiangda: Tanxu fashi dui xiaoyun fashi de yingxiang" (Intensively, Inward Promoting Greater Freedom: Tanxu's Influence on Xiuwan), *Huaan Journal of Humanities* 3(June 2004): 195–226.

10. Chinese Buddhist Institute, ed., "Fayunsi" (Dharma Cloud Temple), *Taiwan foxu yuansuo jiaoyu nianjian chuankanhao* (The First Issue of the Taiwanese Buddhist Institutes' Yearbook) (Taipei: Dongchu, 1998), pp. 171–73.

11. It was Bhikṣuṇī Xiuci who proposed the establishment of a Buddhist school at Eternal Light Nunnery. Like other students of Hiuwan at Chinese Cultural University, Xiuci stayed at nearby Eternal Light Nunnery. See Lotus Ashram, ed., *The History of Lotus Ashram* (Lianhuayuan ji) (Taipei: Yuan Chuan Press, 1985).

12. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, "Prajña: The Philosophy and Life of Venerable Shig Hiu Wan," *Festschrift for Venerable Hui Wan* (Taipei: Institute of Asian Humanities of Huaan University and Institute of Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, 2005).

13. Don A. Pittman, *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism: Taixu's Reforms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

14. Charles B. Jones, "Transitions in the Practice and Defense of Chinese Pure Land Buddhism," *Buddhism in the Modern World: Adaptations of an Ancient Tradition*, ed. Steven Heine and Charles S. Prebish (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 125–42.

15. Raoul Birnbaum, "Master Hongyi Looks Back: A Modern Man Becomes a Monk in Twentieth-Century China," *ibid.*, pp. 75–124.

16. Richard Hunn, ed. (trans. Charles Luk), *Empty Cloud: The Autobiography of the Chinese Zen Master Hsu Yun* (Salisbury, UK: Element Books, 1988).

17. Yu-chen Li, "Lay Buddhist Female Piety in Shanghai during the 1930s," paper presented at the Fifth Annual International Conference of the Lay Buddhist Forum (Seoul: Lay Buddhist Forum, 2011), pp. 26–30.

18. One of the reasons that Hiuwan stayed at the professors' housing rather than at the nunnery may have been to take care of her mother.

19. For instance, the first chairperson of the Huafan Board of Trustees, Bhikṣuṇī Jingding, sent all of her disciples to study at the Lotus Ashram; the present chairperson, Bhikṣuṇī Dijiao, herself graduated from the Lotus Ashram.

10

Pongnyōgwan

The Eminent *Bhikṣuṇī* of Cheju Island

Hyangsoon Yi

Bhikṣuṇī Pongnyōgwan (1865–1938) has left an indelible mark on the socio-cultural history of Cheju Island in Korea. She transformed the religious topography of Cheju in the early twentieth century by reviving Buddhism, which had disappeared for nearly two centuries. Despite her vital contribution to today's Buddhist community on the island, the details of Pongnyōgwan's extraordinary life were not fully known to mainlanders until recently. It was in 2006 that her fifth-generation Dharma heir Bhikṣuṇī Hyejōn introduced her at a conference on the lives and practices of Korean Buddhist nuns, held by the National Bhikṣuṇī Assembly of Korea.

In this chapter, I first survey the state of Buddhism on Cheju Island in the premodern period. Against this historical backdrop, I trace the amazing life path of Pongnyōgwan. While covering salient aspects of Pongnyōgwan's biography, special attention is paid to her unusual pattern of practice and especially her well-known miracle work, which is still vividly remembered by islanders. In the last part of this chapter, I briefly address a problematic relationship between gender and supernatural ability as a sign of eminence in the context of Korean Buddhism.

Cheju in the Korean Buddhist World

Cheju is the largest island in Korea, located off the southwestern coast of the Korean peninsula. Because of its size and distance from the mainland, this