

The 15th conference of the Sakyadhita International Association of Buddhist Women, held at the University of Hong Kong from June 22 to 28, was attended by over 750 Buddhist nuns and lay women from 32 countries!

The name Sakyadhita means Daughter of Shakya (denoting the clan name of the historical Buddha).

[Sakyadhita International](#) is an alliance of women and men whose goal it is to empower the world's 300 million Buddhist women to work for peace and social justice and to advance their spiritual and secular lives. They hold an international conference every two years, the first of which was held in Bodhgaya, India, in 1987. This year celebrated Sakyadhita's 30 year anniversary with the theme, "Contemporary Buddhist Women: Contemplation, Cultural Exchange & Social Action, ".

For one-week laywomen, nuns, laymen, and monks from many different nations and backgrounds gathered in harmony to share their ideas and experiences. The program included a rich mixture of panel presentations, workshops, Dharma talks, meditations, chanting and cultural performances. At the end, there was a two-day tour of several Buddhist sites around Hong Kong.

I had the great fortune to attend this year. It was inspiring to talk with so many different Buddhists, to learn about their monasteries, current and future projects, traditions and to hear about what they are doing and what inspires them.

In the Opening Ceremony on the first day, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo (President of Sakyadhita International) and Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo (Co-founder and organizer) gave inspiring welcoming speeches in the vast Grand Hall of the University.

Jetsunma emphasized that the conference aims to empower laywomen and monastics around the world, and to bridge scholars and practitioners. It also shares practices such as loving kindness, thereby helping to bring peace and wisdom into the world.

Jetsunma also expressed the hope that this years' meet could serve as a bridge to strengthen the connection between East and West. She emphasized that the conference celebrates the achievements of both monastic and lay Buddhist women, and that even though the conference was about women, it is certainly not anti-men, and all the lay and monastic men present were most welcome!

The last day started with more than twenty focus groups on such topics as Social Engagement, Justice, Future of Sakyadhita, Science and Buddhism, and Monastic Training in East and West. Most of the Western nuns joined the focus group on Monastic Training. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo shared the difficulties of Western nuns, particularly the lack of financial support from their Tibetan teachers and from lay people. She brought up examples of monastics that have not been treated well or that have lived under difficult circumstances, although contributing greatly to the developments of Buddhist centers.

During the breaks and meal times, I participated in valuable discussions with nuns and laywomen from all over the world and all traditions. We discussed a wide range of topics from reviving full ordination for nuns, building monasteries, support and training for westerners and even FPMT International Sangha Day!

It was indeed a unique and rich celebration of all Buddhist traditions coming together to better understand, help support and appreciate each other.

Drolkar McCallum

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