

Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies (2023)
University of Cambridge

***The Spectrum of Unlimited
Possibilities for Religion in Taiwan***

**Unpacking and Reassessing
Narratives and Protagonists**



Dr Stefania Travagnin (SOAS)

First lecture: 4 May (Thur)
Second Lecture: 9 May (Tue)

5pm, Room LG17, Faculty of Law (Sidgwick Site)

Second Lecture

Listening to Marginal Female Experiences The Narrative of (In)visible Eminent Women in Taiwanese Buddhism



5pm, 9 May (Tuesday), 2023
Room LG17, Faculty of Law (Sidgwick Site)

Religion in Taiwan has been characterized by a constant narrative of female figures. The most worshipped deities on the island are probably Mazu and Guanyin, two female deities that are associated with, respectively, Daoism and Buddhism, but are also found very often together in the same temples. And the most popular religious person today is the nun Zhengyan (b.1937), founder and leader of Tzu Chi Foundation, and whose charisma and works have been explored extensively by local and Western scholarship. This lecture will shift the attention from the well-known and studied Buddhist women to the less known but equally remarkable nuns that have been nonetheless protagonist of the Buddhist discourse. From the nuns who led women's practice during the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) to the nuns who promoted women's ordination in the early 1950s; from the Buddhist woman who introduce Vajrayana practice to Taiwan to pioneers in the development of education and social service. These women have been clearly visible to certain communities and historical periods, while have later become invisible in the construction of the historical narrative. Listening to these more marginal female experiences will then help us rethink history and agency in the development of Buddhism on the island.

Speaker



Stefania Travagnin teaches at SOAS, University of London. Before joining SOAS, she held the position of founding Director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture in Asia at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. She has a MA in Chinese Studies from Ca'Foscari University (Italy) and a PhD in the Study of Religion from SOAS. Travagnin has done field research among Buddhist communities in Taiwan for more than twenty years, has been visiting scholar in several Taiwanese institutes like Academia Sinica, National Cheng Chi University, and the Center of Chinese Studies at the National Central Library of Taipei; she has active collaborations with Taiwanese Buddhist institutions like Tzu Chi Foundation, and is a research fellow at the Center for the Study of Buddhism in Taiwan in Hsuan-Chuang University. Her research and publications on religion in Taiwan have explored especially Buddhist women, the phenomenon of Humanistic Buddhism, religion and media, and life and works of the monk Yinshun. In the past few years she has also researched Buddhist communities in Sichuan, and is currently co-director of the multiyear project “Mapping Religious Diversity in Modern Sichuan” (CCKF funds, 2017-2023). She has edited or co-edited several volumes, including *Religion and Media in China: Insights and Case Studies from the Mainland, Taiwan, and Hong Kong* (Routledge, 2016), and the three-volume publication *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions* (De Gruyter, 2019-2020). She is also co-editor of the journal *Contemporary Buddhism*, and editor-in-chief of *Review of Religion and Chinese Society*.