

Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh - Founder (Ven. Ta Tao Fa Tzu)

Ven. Voramai Kabilsingh, her laywoman's name, was born in 1908 in Rajburi province. She was the founder and the first abbess of the monastery. Before ordaining, she led a very colorful and interesting life. In 1972, she travelled by bicycle from Bangkok to Singapore. She was the only Girl Scout to travel by bicycle. It took her 29 days, a record that still stands today.

She was a writer, a poet, a novelist apart from being a teacher serving the Thai Government for the first part of her life. During World War II, she was married to Mr. K. Shatsena, a member of Parliament from Trang in the southern part of Thailand. Because of this, she had to stay in the south for a short period of time.

When her daughter, Chatsumarn Shatsena was born, she moved back to Bangkok mainly concerned about the quality of education for her child.

By chance, she became interested and curious about meditation and became further committed to study Buddhism directly from the texts, the Tripitaka. She started publishing Buddhist monthly magazine in 1955 and kept on this commitment for 32 years.

She was inspired by the teachings of the Buddha and took her first ordination in 1956 from Chaokhun Prommuni (Vice abbot of Wat Bowonniwet Vihara, a royal temple, <http://watbowon.org>) and thus her monastic life began. At that time, the ordination of women as monks (bhikkhuni) was not practiced in Thailand so 15 years later, in 1971, she went to Taiwan and received full ordination. She became the first Thai woman to have taken this full ordination properly as bhikkhuni.

Even before bhikkhuni ordination, Ven. Ta Tao Fa Tzu was preparing the ground for the temple. The Uposatha (main hall) a three-storey building with sima boundary took her 10 years to complete. This is the most important building as sanghakamma (monastic ceremony) must be performed within sima.

Along with the Uposatha, she also built the school for kindergarten up to grade 6. There were some 500 students attending the school at that time.

The school was run by Ms. Marndaratna Shatsena for more than 30 years and closed when Ms. Marndaratna Shatsena took her retirement in

2003 during the time of the second abbess, Ven. Dhammananda, Ven. Ta Tao Fa Tzu's only daughter.

Ven. Ta Tao Fa Tzu tried to train young women to become monastics, but it was only short-lived. Being the only bhikkhuni did not allow her to perform any proper sanghakamma. But she did much work on social welfare, i.e. giving out food and clothing to poor students in rural areas. She sponsored more than 100 Buddha statues and had them sent away to temples or Buddhist centers in remote areas. Also, for some years she arranged regular food offering to 108 monks.

She lived through her peaceful ripe old age of 95 before passing away on June 24th, 2003, leaving behind her daughter who had just received full ordination as a bhikkhuni to continue the heritage. It may be said that this temple has an unbroken lineage of bhikkhuni since 1971.

For the interested reader, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh tells the story of her mother's path in this article *Eminent Buddhist Women – Bhikkhuni Ta Tao*, an excerpt of the book "Eminent Buddhist Women" ([see publication list](#)). You can also find details on Wikipedia at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhammananda_Bhikkhuni.