



International Young Bodhisattva Program 2024: Impressions from six Alumni

Stepping onto the Path of Awakening

By William, Myanmar

Having the opportunity to join the IYBP in Taiwan, hosted by buddhist Hongshi College, marks the beginning of my journey on the path of awakening. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the INEB members and those who support the IYBP. Your loving-kindness-based warm support, how you cordially welcomed, treated and cared for all of our Kalyanamitta who joined the IYBP.

My reflection on the program is based on my experiences, what I learned (from lectures, discussions, sharing with peers, Metta

in action, and field trips), and my interactions with Bodhisattva Kalyanamitta from various wonderful lands.

I have been grappling with many challenging situations, primarily stemming from the ongoing crisis in my home country, Myanmar. Armed conflicts, intense political instability, financial difficulties, and uncertainties amidst the chaotic circumstances have made life miserable and made many Myanmar people vulnerable. Although I am currently studying in Thailand, where I have a relatively safe daily life, I still struggle with mental distress, particularly when I learn about the worsening of the situation in my homeland. Moreover, the global situation, including the Ukraine-Russia conflict,

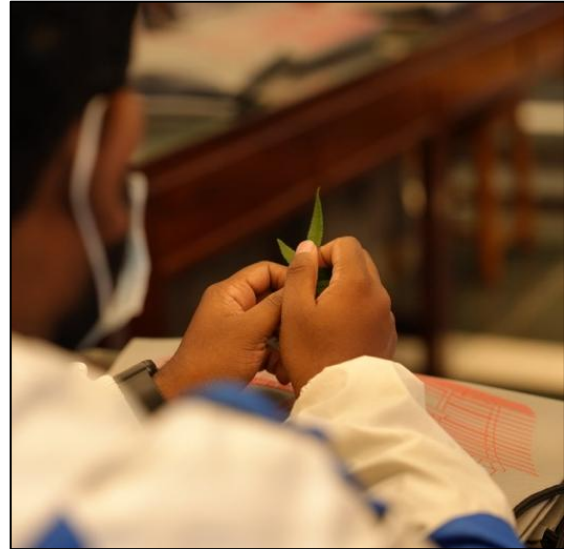
tensions in the Middle East, the Gaza crisis, and many other distressing news stories, have left me feeling hopeless about achieving sustainable peace on our planet.

Fortunately, my participation in this program has helped me to step onto the awakening path. I simply define a Bodhisattva as one who strives to attain awakening or enlightenment. The fundamental step for a Bodhisattva is to be awake. I was previously lost in a state of slumber, easily consumed by negative emotions, mental distress, material desires, and addiction to the virtual world, where I could hide my true self and my vulnerabilities. This kind of slumber was not healing; it was not a true rest for my body and mind. I was drowning in a deep sleep filled with suffering.

“This program awakened me. I heard the gentle and soothing sound of the buddhist Hongshi temple bell. The sound of the dhamma, Metta, and the warm embrace of my Kalyanamitta resonated within me.”

During the program, we explored many important topics: mindful consumption, power analysis, non-violent movements, Dukkha Analysis, vegetarianism, LGBTQIA+, healthy sexuality, artificial intelligence, the Ten Paramitas, diverse schools of

buddhism, environmental issues, and civic engagement. The gathering of Kalyanamitta from diverse religious backgrounds, sexual orientations, geographic locations, and fields made the program truly unique. The program practically demonstrated a way to live peacefully in a diverse world.



Meditation at Xiang Guan Shan Temple

Although we spoke different languages, we could communicate through the language of Metta. I cherished the Metta in action experiences, where I felt connected to all my dhamma friends from the college who warmly supported us in every way, from providing food and accommodation to offering warm clothing during a severe typhoon. It is truly a caring community that embodies the teachings of the Buddha in everyday life. These experiences awakened me from my slumber, encouraged me to stay awake, energized me to appreciate the beauty of the dhamma, and enlightened me to address suffering effectively.

“Most importantly, this IYBP has become a starting point for my growth mindset.”

May all blessings be upon all my dhamma friends and Kalyanamitta!

Cultivating Inclusive Leadership: Lessons from the Ten Pāramitās to Empower and Resolve Challenges in LGBTIQ Communities

By Heshan, Sri Lanka

In an increasingly interconnected yet divided world, the challenges we face – environmental degradation, climate change, economic disparity, and social inequality – demand leadership that is both inclusive and compassionate. As a young LGBTIQ activist from Sri Lanka, I have witnessed firsthand the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly in South Asia. Societal stigma, lack of government support, and inadequate awareness about gender diversity compound the issues faced by the LGBTIQ community and other minorities. To address these challenges, it is essential to cultivate leaders who embody equality, wisdom, and compassion.

The International Young Bodhisattva Program (IYBP), organized by the

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), provided a transformative platform to explore these qualities. Held at the serene Hongshi College in Taiwan, the program offered a unique space where activists, social service providers, and scholars from across the globe came together to reflect on leadership inspired by Buddhist values. Hongshi College not only hosted us but also graciously provided accommodations and meals, creating a nurturing environment for learning and collaboration.

A Global Gathering of Change makers

The IYBP brought together a diverse group of participants, including laypeople and ordained individuals, from countries such as India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Cambodia, Korea, Switzerland, Canada, Bhutan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka. This vibrant mix of Buddhist and non-Buddhist activists highlighted the program’s inclusive nature. Together, we delved into the Ten Pāramitās, the virtues of a Bodhisattva: generosity, morality, patience, effort, concentration, wisdom, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity.

Applying the Ten Pāramitās to Global Challenges

Through lively discussions and interactive sessions, we explored how these virtues could address pressing issues like



Discussion amongst the participants

peacebuilding, coexistence, conflict resolution, and ethical leadership. The program emphasized the importance of integrating the Pāramitās into personal life and leadership practices, equipping us with tools to tackle real-world challenges. Practical exercises and conceptual reflections helped us to reimagine solutions rooted in compassion, wisdom, and ethical power-sharing.

One of the most heartwarming experiences during the International Young Bodhisattva Program was witnessing the embodiment of the Ten Pāramitās – qualities like generosity, morality, patience, effort, and loving-kindness – through the "Metta in Action" activities. Every morning, participants were greeted with the joyful smiles of volunteers,

who exemplified these virtues by selflessly caring for others. As someone explained, "I clean the dishes, I smile... that's how I learn Dharma. Every day, I feel happy." Her simple yet powerful words reflect the essence of loving-kindness (Metta) and generosity (Dāna) – acts of service done with a pure heart and intention.

Participants shared how these moments inspired them to cultivate the Bodhisattva qualities in their own life, emphasizing the importance of mindfulness, effort, and compassion. This experience reminds us that the path of a Bodhisattva is not only about grand gestures but also about finding joy in small, meaningful acts that bring happiness and well-being to others.

Leadership for a Compassionate Future

One of the program's most profound lessons was how leadership inspired by the Bodhisattva-ideal transcends religious boundaries to create a universal framework for action. INEB and Hongshi College facilitated an environment where participants could deeply engage with these principles while fostering global connections.

The program's emphasis on inclusivity, collaboration, and ethical leadership demonstrated how the timeless teachings of the Pāramitās could guide us in addressing modern issues. It also underscored the importance of creating safe spaces for dialogue and mutual learning, especially for marginalized groups like the LGBTIQ community, who often remain unheard in traditional leadership paradigms.

Reflections and Gratitude

The practices of the Ten Pāramitās are not merely philosophical ideals; they hold profound relevance for addressing the complexities of modern life, especially for marginalized communities like the LGBTIQ community and other minorities. In a world often divided by conflict, inequality, and power imbalances, the virtues of compassion, patience, and loving-kindness provide a pathway to heal wounds and build bridges of understanding. These practices challenge traditional power dynamics by encouraging

leaders to act with humility, fairness, and ethical responsibility, ensuring no voice is silenced or ignored. For the LGBTIQ community, which frequently faces systemic discrimination and societal stigma, these principles offer tools to navigate conflict with resilience and foster spaces of inclusivity and acceptance.

“By integrating generosity, wisdom, and determination into our lives, we can transform not only individual struggles but also broader societal systems, creating a world where every individual, regardless of identity, can thrive in dignity and peace.”

Participating in the IYBP was a deeply enriching experience that left me inspired and empowered to pursue compassionate leadership in my activism. The program's ability to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds and beliefs highlighted the unifying power of shared values. I am profoundly grateful to INEB for organizing this visionary initiative and to Hongshi College for their unwavering support in hosting us.

As I continue my journey as a youth activist, I carry forward the lessons of the International Young Bodhisattva Program with

the hope of building a world that is not only just but also profoundly compassionate.

“Together, through understanding and action, we can face the challenges of our time and create a future that embodies peace and inclusivity for all.”

(An interview with Heshan about the IYBP 2024 conducted by The Morning can be found [here](#).)

Journey to Taiwan: Exploring the concept of Bodhisattva

By Duyen, Vietnam

When I wrote down my New Year's goals for 2024, traveling overseas wasn't even on my mind. It was a secret wish, something I thought about sometimes but didn't really think I'd do. But looking back, it's like I was quietly hoping for the chance to see my dear friends at INEB. It all started when I found a book called “Return to Our Pure Nature” by Tzu Chi founder, Master Cheng Yen. The Tzu Chi Foundation, a big charity in Taiwan, suddenly felt important. Maybe, I think, my whole trip started at that moment. Then, in June, a friend told me about IYBP 2024 in Taiwan. I applied without thinking twice, feeling like I just had to. After dealing with visa stuff, I finally arrived in

Taiwan at the end of October, ready to meet friends.

From the time I got to IYBP and Hongshi College, I felt at home. The warm and caring people there were like family to me. We were all amazed by how gentle and caring the venerables were.

It wasn't just words; it was in everything they did, a real kindness that touched me. The memories of the yummy vegan food and the snacks, always available in the kitchen and everywhere, make me smile.



Snacks that could be found everywhere

I really remember getting very sick on the bus. A kind venerable gave me a robe, a hat, and a neck cover to keep me warm. Putting the robe on felt like being wrapped in a blanket, and my friends laughed when they saw me. Another time while struggling during another bus ride, I kept falling asleep.

The venerable sitting next to me gently let me rest my head on her shoulder, making me comfortable for the rest of the trip back to the temple.

Then there were the quiet moments, late nights in our room, my roommates and I talking and giggling, sharing our little stories; the fun talks about where different snacks came from and how to eat them; the relaxing time we had meditating, with a really loud snore making us laugh; the peaceful walks through the quiet countryside; even getting lost together on the way to the park!

I think about us dancing and singing together at Lumbini classroom, about the laughing and singing in the hall on our first and final days. I remember walking proudly in Taipei at the Pride Parade. Simple things,

like having milk tea while walking around the town, are now special memories.

“I’ll never forget walking around Drum Mountain, looking at the beautiful green grass, the blue sky, and the sea.”

Actually, as I’m writing this, I don’t just remember the things that happened; I’m feeling the emotions, the peace and the connection I had with these friends I had only met for two weeks. We gave each other small gifts from our countries, and instead of saying goodbye, we hugged and patted each other on the back, a quiet promise to see each other again.

What was most important to me about the two weeks was the real, quiet friendships



Participants enjoying Dharma Drum Mountain

we created by taking care of each other. We were like kids, learning and growing together in a joyful way. I really admire my friends, especially the social activists who work so hard for their communities. They have become a huge inspiration for me.

During this experience, I had the opportunity to explore the meaning of engaged Buddhism in today's world. It's not just about identifying as a Buddhist or practicing Buddhism but about integrating Buddha's teachings into everyday life to support and uplift other sentient beings, both physically and spiritually. Along this path, those who dedicate themselves to serving others are seen as Bodhisattvas.



Last day of the program

For me, being a Bodhisattva isn't about reaching a final goal; it's a continuous journey filled with challenges and moments of

enlightenment. Through this program and beyond, I've realized that I am never alone on this journey.

Hope to see you soon IYBP!

Learning to Engage Buddhism with Typhoons

By Areeya, Thailand

Thick gray nimbostratus clouds spanned across and covered the sky of Guanyin District on the island of Taiwan. The clouds appeared much lower than usual as if I stood on top of a mountain, closer to the sky. The clouds moved fast and transformed smoothly and quickly as I breathed in deeply on the morning of the typhoon day.

The 2024 International Young Bodhisattva Program (IYBP), hosted at Hongshi Buddhist College, commenced on October 23. Throughout the 12-day program, the facilitators invited us to contemplate, "what does being a Bodhisattva mean to you?" Regardless of our religious affiliations or beliefs, the program aimed to equip young people with spiritual, physical, and intellectual awareness and confidence to dig into the roots of "dukkha" or "suffering" in our modern societies – by exercising loving-kindness and compassion.

“By the ninth day, my body was filled with new energy and new information from being exposed

to a new environment, new routines, new perspectives, and new friendships.”

Tropical depression turned turbulent and Typhoon Kong-rey intensified around the same time as we delved deeper into the analysis of power, oppression, mindfulness, and personal transformation. As the typhoon approached northwestern Taiwan, it continued to keep us indoors. Instead of visiting the Tzu Chi Guan Du Recycling Center and learning about hospice care at the Dabei Xueyuan Great Compassion Institute, we had a day to relax, detach from the planned schedule, and become aware of the typhoon.

The trees shook, bended, and resisted the strong winds. The temperature plummeted. In the adjacent fields, short sun hemp seedlings submerged under water. The water in the canal rose and became hasty.

I tried to remember the warmth of the blue open sky and the bright sunshine that casted shadows to beings a week ago. That sunny day also happened to be the day we got the chance to stand on the grass with the Bhikkhunis at Xiang-Kuang Mountain Temple. From the first interaction to sunset, venerable Bhikkhuni Zinai guided us to attend to the sentient vegetal beings around us.



Venerable Chao-Hwei of Hongshi College

Freshly picked green leaves with serrate margins laid down on the tables when we entered the large classroom hall at Xiang Kuang. Venerable Zinai invited us to loosen and relax our bodies. Let us know the leaf through touching, noticing, smelling, listening, and tasting. Focusing and paying attention like this enabled me to delicately interact with the present at that moment and my own senses. Later during the tea meditation ceremony, we travelled through time to be aware of the transient flavors and scents of Alishan tea leaves. We immersed ourselves as we lifted, smelled, and sipped the tea.



Chinese Tea Meditation Ceremony

Yet, opening my senses and being true to myself during meditation were not easy tasks for an individual. The presence of my queer friends was crucial for my learning experience, to overcome self-doubt, self-judgment, and perfectionism. Although we did not have a specific time slot to explore LGBTIQ+ other than doing a gender unicorn exercise and participating in the annual Taiwan Pride Parade, witnessing my queer friends express their authentic selves was important for me.

“It helped me to learn to accept and to forgive myself – to be true to myself and to apologize to a part of me that I had been hiding.”

This aspect was immensely essential for me to realize the first level of knowledge in the Sangarava Sutta: to listen, sense, and observe.

The hot afternoon sun made space for us to stand on the grassy hillside of the Xiang-Kuang Mountain, overlooking the city and the trees on the horizon. The chilly breeze in the open air brushed my bare feet and made it feel as if the ground was embracing me and I experienced a sense of feeling grounded. I contemplated the Parami card that each of us received at Xiang Kuang and the earlier group discussion on cultivating

the Ten Paramis. How might we practice the ten essential Parami virtues to heal and transform individual and social suffering? How might we cultivate patience, truthfulness, equanimity, and loving-kindness, among others, to nourish our relationships with others?

During the typhoon days at Hongshi, the windows occasionally rattled during the learning sessions. The wind left tangible traces. Rain continued to pour down as a myriad of plants firmly held their ground. When I finally had to go outside and walk to the dining hall, the strong wind flipped my umbrella inside-out. I swayed. A few friends stood by my side and exclaimed loudly. We all stood firm until the wind slowed down a few seconds later.

My initial expectation was to learn how the Taiwanese monastic Buddhist communities engaged with the secular society. The distance between the two previously seemed too grand to me. Theravada Buddhist monks had been telling me to work on my inner self to be an agent of change.

What I learned during the IYBP instead were everyday life practices, from the daily Metta in action – chores around the grounds of Hongshi College – to eating only vegetarian food, guided meditations, examples presented in the lectures, and the stories of the bhikkhunis. I could both accept myself

and express compassion to others to respond to the complex societal sufferings.

Before and after every meal, we were guided through a short prayer and reminded to be grateful and compassionate to all sentient beings. Sessions on mindful consumption – from learning the life cycle and supply chain of disposable products to data security and privacy in the age of social media and information technology – invited us to remain mindful during our daily practices and engaged in the face of multiscale structural violence.

But the concept did not always sit well with me, as when I was reminded of the persistent violence and the displacements in Myanmar. In her opening remarks, venerable Chao-Hwei Shih posed a question on what a Bodhisattva might do if your house were on fire and your beloved ones remained inside.

As Myanmar friends introduced their country's cultural diversity and the consequences of the 2021 coup, the atmosphere in the classroom intensified with uneasiness.

As a person from a neighboring country of Myanmar, I felt I could only observe the violent attack and social trauma the people of Myanmar had to endure. The devastating political and cultural suffering might not enable us to see a clear way out, especially

compared to how straightforward Taiwan monitored and prepared for seasonal typhoons. Our discussions on nonviolent actions and campaigns only triggered more confusion. I was confronted with the reality that people are being shot, abused, tortured, and oppressed.

“If I see a person beaten up in front of me at a street protest, would I be able to distance myself from the aggressor, to meditate and seek ways towards liberation peacefully? What if the person who set your house on fire and took your beloved ones away was also stuck in the burning house? Would you try to save them? How would you ensure that the one who started the fire is held accountable?”

The eye of the typhoon finally hovered over us. The temperature rose and the wind calmed. The typhoon could have led to devastating losses and damages. Among us visitors we appreciated the typhoon warning system, the official declaration for a day off, and strong infrastructure to keep us safe and sound indoors. We were lucky that Hongshi had its own kitchen and generous volunteers



Roundtable Discussions at Hongshi College

to ensure food was available for us. I was grateful that Taiwan recognized the immensity of such typhoons and continuously developed means and measures to protect itself.

The lesson about the four noble truths a couple of days later was guided by Jonathan Watts and referred to Thich Nhat Hanh's emphasis on suffering with others. Being aware of the discomforts and griefs is an important practice to not disassociate ourselves from worldly makings and to remain hopeful throughout collective traumatic experiences. During the guided vipassana meditation, we straightened our spine and continuously focused on our breathing to be

present. I loved Watts' guidance, noticing our feelings but refraining from labeling them. If I could sense and experience the freshly picked green leaf at Xiang-Kuang Mountain Temple without judging, why couldn't I listen to my own body and confront my own suffering?

Witnessing joyful laughter and genuine smiles were my most cherished moments of the program. During the keynote speech, the Path of Bodhisattva Cultivating Compassion and Altruism, Ajan Sulak Sivaraksa highlighted the concept of kalyanamitta, spiritual friends. I believe that becoming a Bodhisattva cannot be done alone. Confronting discomforts and liberating

ourselves and other sentient beings requires painstaking efforts to build trust in oneself and others.

Together we attempted to cultivate a safe space to joyously laugh, sing, disagree, listen, and meditate. Hongshi Buddhist College and the IYBP provided me with a strong physical infrastructure to feel safe from the typhoon, life-nourishing meals for the mind and the body, and a quiet space to learn how to be myself. The IYBP friends created a transient space where we could ground ourselves in the present and be authentic, be connected, free, and flowing with others.

International Young Bodhisattva Program

By Khun, Myanmar



Khun at the Taiwan Pride Parade

I had the privilege of taking part in Taiwan's International Young Bodhisattva Program, which was a life-changing event that emphasized social change and spiritual resurgence. The program offered young leaders

from 17 different countries a chance to learn about Buddhist teachings and how they may be used to solve world issues. This report examines my experience with the program, the most important lessons I took away, and how these lessons will direct my involvement in my community.

The program was structured around workshops, presentations, group works, meditation sessions, and group discussions, as well as field trips, each designed to expand our understanding of Buddhist teachings and their relevance in today's world.

Workshops on Compassionate Leadership

We explored how compassion can be an essential component of leadership through engaging workshops. I was able to understand the significance of making decisions with empathy and how it affects the creation of significant change by participating in activities and case studies.

“The focus on compassion strengthened my resolve to provide compassionate, understanding service to my community.”

Meditation and Mindfulness Practice

I was able to develop inner calm and mindfulness through daily meditation practices.

These practices inspired me to realize how important it is to maintain a positive attitude in the face of difficulties. It was really helpful to learn how to use mindfulness as a tool for personal development, and I intend to incorporate it into my daily routine.



Daily Meditation Practice

Discussing Social Transformation

In group discussions, we explored the concept of “Bodhisattva” as a commitment to serve humanity selflessly. These sessions inspired me to reflect on the challenges my community faces and how I can contribute to creating solutions through a lens of compassion and resilience.

Conclusion

The International Young Bodhisattva Program was an enlightening experience that equipped me with tools for personal growth and social impact. I am grateful for getting the opportunity to be part of this journey and look forward to applying these insights to create positive change in my community.

What is a Bodhisattva?

By Linus, Switzerland

What is a Bodhisattva? When you look up this question on Google the answer you get is that a Bodhisattva is someone, who is on the path to Buddhahood, someone who seeks enlightenment. So far, so good but what does this mean in today’s world and what does a program look like that is centered around the idea of Bodhisattva?

The International Young Bodhisattva Program (IYBP) 2024 took place from October 22 to November 4 at the Buddhist Hongshi College in Taiwan. People from across Southeast Asia and beyond travelled there to be part of this experience. A principal factor of this program is recognizing the challenges that we are currently facing as humans. Too many countries have not yet achieved enduring peace and social justice, societies are still struggling due to predominant post-colonial and capitalist structures.

“Structural and cultural violence is omni-present, and we face the most serious environmental crisis in the history of humankind. At the same time, values such as compassion, forgiveness, sharing, and forming relationships are neglected and

traditions throughout many societies are eroding.”

As one of this year’s guest speakers, Jon Watts pointed out, all these developments are inter-connected. To single out one issue and trying to fix it while ignoring others is impossible. The IYBP is structured accordingly. The participants took part in a variety of workshops, projects, and field trips where they learned about and discussed different topics. These activities were led by the organizers of the program, volunteers who agreed to contribute their wisdom, as well as the participants themselves. Every day a new set of topics was covered. Participants learned about the power dynamics and inequality within societies and how oppressed people can fight for their rights and make their voices heard. They were introduced to the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community and concepts of sexuality and gender, which go beyond heteronormativity. There were discussions on the environmental crisis and how more mindfulness and simplicity should be practiced instead of mindlessly chasing material development. Furthermore, there were talks on sexuality and sexual health, the mechanisms behind today’s digital world, and last but not least every participant got the chance to introduce the others to their respective cultural and background. All these discussions were held within a Buddhist context since an

important part of the IYBP is to find ways in which Buddhist concepts, practices and traditional knowledge can be used to solve the problems at hand.

Gaining and sharing knowledge, however, is only one part of the IYBP. While taking part in this program, the participants were practicing what they had learned and discussed throughout the sessions. Hongshi College was a place where everyone was welcome regardless of background, gender, race, religion, sexuality etc.

“A safe space where different views and experiences could be shared, and participants listened to and learned from each other. This factor was extremely important since the goal of the IYBP is to help young people to realize their own potential and enable them to contribute to society in a meaningful way.”

During the two weeks of the program, the participants immersed themselves in a Buddhist lifestyle. Hongshi College is a Buddhist institution that is run by a group of bhikkhunis – Buddhist nuns. A central part of the program was to get up before 06.00am in the morning for breakfast,



Field Trip to Xiang Kuang Mountain

taking part in Buddhist ceremonies, practicing meditation every day, and eating vegetarian food for the duration of the program.

This program enabled the participants to be part of a unique intercultural experience, and to grow as people. The ones who took part were activists, social workers, educators, and monks. The IYBP's goal was for everyone to take the lessons they learned back to their homes and to apply them in their own lives. Furthermore, the participants had the opportunity to connect to each other and build a network of like-minded friends, with whom they could stay in contact and potentially collaborate with in the future.

So, to come back to the question of “What is a Bodhisattva?”. After two weeks at Hongshi one might conclude that a Bodhisattva is someone who aspires to live by the values and lessons that were taught throughout this program.

“Someone who leads with love and compassion and who recognizes their part in addressing the suffering in their society and throughout the world.”