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The Revival of the *Bhikkhunī* Order and the Decline of the *Sāsana*

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The Revival of the *Bhikkhunī* Order and the Decline of the *Sāsana*

Bhikkhu Anālayo¹

Abstract

In this article I study the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order in the Theravāda traditions and its supposed relation to a decline of the Buddha’s dispensation.

Introduction

My presentation begins with the contrast between the positive evaluation of the existence of an order of *bhikkhunīs* in early Buddhist discourse and the “prediction of decline,” according to which the establishing of this order would result in a decline of the Buddha’s dispensation (*sāsana*). Next I survey modern-day apprehensions that the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order constitutes a “Mahāyāna threat”; and then explore the “Theravāda sense of identity.” In an attempt to cover the legal issue of reviving *bhikkhunī* ordination in detail, I examine the alternatives of “dual ordination” and “single ordination.” Finally I turn to the current

¹ I am indebted to Bhikhu Bodhi, Sāmaṇerī Dhammadinnā, Petra Kieffer-Pülz, Shi Kongmu, Kester Ratcliff and Martin Seeger for commenting on a draft version of the present paper and to Stefano Zacchetti for help in getting a needed publication.

situation of nuns who have not received full ordination in the Theravāda traditions as instances of an “actual decline.”²

The Prediction of Decline

As a way of getting into my subject of the relationship between the establishing of an order of *bhikkhunīs* and what according to early Buddhist texts leads to a decline of the *sāsana*, I begin by translating a short discourse from the *Samyukta-āgama*. This discourse has a parallel in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and another parallel in the *Ekottarika-āgama*.³ The three versions describe the role of the four assemblies—*bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers and female lay followers—as part of the Buddhist community (*saṅgha*) in general.

Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying at Sāvattihī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park.⁴ At that time the Blessed One said to the *bhikkhus*: “There are four types of well disciplined assemblies.⁵ What are the four? That is, [they are] a disciplined *bhikkhu*, a disciplined *bhikkhunī*, a disciplined male lay follower, and a disciplined

² In what follows, I use the term “*bhikkhunī*” to refer to female monastics who have received higher ordination (*upasamapadā*), whereas with the term “nun” I refer to traditions of female monastics such as the Burmese *thila shins*, Sri Lankan *dasasil mātās*, and Thai *mae chis*.

³ SĀ 873 at T II 220c4 to 220c16, with parallels in AN 4.7 at AN II 8,7 to 8,24, translated at the end of this article, and EĀ 27.7 at T II 645c18 to 646a6. I employ Pāli terminology in my translation without thereby intending to take a position on the original language of the *Samyukta-āgama* manuscript used for translation into Chinese, which according to de Jong (108) would have been Sanskrit.

⁴ EĀ 27.7 T II 645c18 agrees on the location, which is not mentioned in AN 4.7.

⁵ Most editions of AN 4.7 just speak of “four”; only C° specifies that these four are “persons,” *puggalā*. EĀ 27.7 at T II 645c19 speaks of “four persons,” 四人.

female lay follower.⁶ These are reckoned the four assemblies.”

At that time, the Blessed One spoke in verse:

“Capable at discussing without fear,
being learned, they have penetrated the Dharma,
they practice the Dharma, following the Dharma,
these are, indeed, the good assemblies.⁷
A *bhikkhu* who maintains his virtue pure,
a *bhikkhunī* who is learned,
a male lay follower who has pure faith,⁸
and a female lay follower who is like that,
these are reckoned the good assemblies,
like the light of the sun, they shine on their own.⁹
Indeed, like this the community is well,

⁶ According to AN 4.7 at AN II 8,10, a member of each of these four assemblies who is competent, *viyatta*, disciplined, *vinīta*, self-confident, *visārada*, learned, *bahussuta*, an upholder of the Dharma, *dhammadhara*, and a practitioner of the Dharma who follows the Dharma, *dhammānudhamma(p)paṭipanna*, illuminates the community, *saṅghaṃ sobhetti*. According to EĀ 27.7 at T II 645c20, a member of each of these four assemblies who is learned, 多聞, conversant with the past, 博古, and has knowledge in regard to the present, 明今, is foremost in the great community, 在大眾中最高第一。

⁷ The corresponding stanza in AN 4.7 at AN II 8,21 concludes by indicating that such a one is reckoned an “illumination of the community,” *saṅghasobhana*. The second part of the corresponding stanza in EĀ 27.7 at T II 645c28 compares such a one to a lion among the community, 在眾為獅子, who is able to get rid of states of timidity, 能除怯弱法。

⁸ AN 4.7 at AN II 8,23 just speaks of “faith,” *saddhā*, without qualifying this as “pure”; the same is the case for EĀ 27.7 at T II 646a1.

⁹ AN 4.7 at AN II 8,24 concludes that these four illuminate the community and are the community’s illumination, after which it ends. EĀ 27.7 at T II 646a2 highlights that these are foremost in the community, 在眾為第一, and in harmony with it; followed by illustrating this with the example of the rising sun, 如日初出時. EĀ 27.7 does not have another stanza at this point, but continues instead with prose.

indeed, this is what is excellent in the community.
This condition leads to the excellence of the community,
like the light of the sun, shining on its own.”

When the Buddha has spoken this discourse, the *bhikkhus*,
hearing what the Buddha had said, were delighted and re-
ceived it respectfully.¹⁰

The three versions of the above discourse present the role of the four assemblies as what illuminates the community in closely similar ways; in fact they even agree in highlighting virtue in the case of a *bhikkhu* in contrast to learnedness in the case of a *bhikkhunī*.¹¹

Another discourse in the *Anguttara-nikāya* clarifies that a *bhikkhunī* would of course also illuminate the community through her virtue.¹² Yet, the learnedness of the *bhikkhunīs* was apparently outstanding enough for the concluding verse of the above-translated discourse to draw attention to this particular quality. There can be little doubt that the agreement among the parallel versions in this respect reflects an appreciation of the presence of learned and virtuous *bhikkhunīs*, considering them to be a considerable asset to the Buddhist community.

¹⁰ AN 4.7 has no formal conclusion. EĀ 27.7 at T II 646a4 reports an injunction by the Buddha that the monks should train like this by being conversant with the past, having knowledge in regard to the present, and being accomplished in the Dharma. This is followed by the standard conclusion according to which the monks delighted in what the Buddha had said.

¹¹ AN 4.7 at A II 8,22, SĀ 873 at T II 220c11 and EĀ 27.7 at T II 645c29.

¹² AN 4.211 at AN II 226,1: *bhikkhunī . . . sīlavatī kalyāṇadhammā parisobhaṇā* (B^e, C^e and S^e: °*sobhanā*). In fact, the commentary on the stanza in AN 4.7, Mp III 7,17, explains that the qualities mentioned in relation to one or the other of the disciples should be understood to apply to all of them.

The same theme of the importance of the four assemblies continues with other discourses.¹³ The *Pāsādika-sutta* in the *Dīgha-nikāya* and its *Dīrgha-āgama* parallel indicate that the completeness of the holy life taught by the Buddha can be seen in the accomplishment of the four assemblies of his disciples.¹⁴ The *Mahāvachchagotta-sutta* and its Chinese parallels in two *Samyukta-āgama* collections make a similar statement. They highlight in particular that the completeness of the Buddha's teaching can be seen in the high numbers of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* who have become fully liberated, and in the fact that similarly high numbers of lay followers of both genders have reached other levels of awakening.¹⁵

The *Lakkhaṇa-sutta* of the *Dīgha-nikāya* even goes so far as to relate the Buddha's possession of all four assemblies of disciples to one of his thirty-two superior bodily marks, which according to tradition are embodiments of a Buddha's virtues and foretokens at his birth of his being destined to become a fully awakened teacher. According to the *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, the wheel-marks on the soles of the Buddha's feet in particular were portents of his destiny to be surrounded by a large retinue of the four assemblies.¹⁶

There can be little doubt that these discourses regard the presence of accomplished *bhikkhunīs* in a very positive light, something that illuminates the community and that is evidence for the completeness of the holy life taught by the Buddha. The existence of an order of *bhik-*

¹³ I already drew attention to these passages in Anālayo ("Women's").

¹⁴ DN 29 at DN III 125,18 and DĀ 17 at T I 73c23.

¹⁵ MN 73 at MN I 490,13, SĀ 964 at T II 246c8 and SĀ² 198 at T II 446b6.

¹⁶ DN 30 at DN III 148,18: *mahāparivāro hoti, mahā'ssa hoti parivāro* (B^e, C^e and S^e: *honti parivārā*) *bhikkhū bhikkhuniyo upāsakā upāsikāyo*. The parallel MĀ 59 just lists the thirty-two marks, without providing a relationship between any of the marks and accomplishments of the Buddha. The corresponding passage in MĀ 59 at T I 493c20 thus just mentions the wheel-marks on the soles of his feet.

khunīs as one of the four assemblies is considered as so integral to the very existence of a Buddha that it is already foretold by one of his superior bodily marks.

A passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* also shows that the *bhikkhunīs* were considered integral to the Buddha's dispensation. The passage reports the Buddha's declaration that he would not pass away until he had accomplished his mission of having disciples from each of the four assemblies—including *bhikkhunīs*—who were competent, disciplined, self-confident and learned.¹⁷ Similar proclamations are recorded in parallels to the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*.¹⁸ In the Pāli canon this statement is found not only in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*, but also in discourses in the *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, and the *Udāna*.¹⁹

A discordant note emerges in a discourse among the Eights of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, found similarly in the Theravāda *Vinaya* and in a range of parallel versions. According to this passage the coming into being of an order of *bhikkhunīs* through the intervention of Ānanda will shorten the lifespan of the Dharma by half, from a thousand years to five hundred years.²⁰

¹⁷ DN 16 at DN II 105,8: *na . . . parinibbāyissāmi yāva me bhikkhuniyo na sāvikā bhavissanti viyattā vinitā . . .* (E° abbreviates).

¹⁸ DĀ 2 at T I 15c4, T 5 at T I 165a19 (which refers to the nuns only implicitly by speaking of the four types of disciples), T 6 at T I 180b27, T 7 at T I 191b28, Sanskrit fragment 361 folio 165 R2f, Waldschmidt (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* 1, 53), with a Tibetan parallel in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, Waldschmidt (*Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* 2, 209,23), and the Chinese counterpart in T 1451 at T XXIV 387c27; a record of this statement can also be found in the *Divyāvadāna*, Cowell and Neil (202,10).

¹⁹ SN 51.10 at SN V 261,18, AN 8.70 at AN IV 310,32 and Ud 6.1 at Ud 63,32. Another occurrence in Chinese translation is T 383 at T XII 1010c29.

²⁰ AN 8.51 at AN IV 278,16 and Vin II 256,9, with parallels in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*, T 1428 at T XXII 923c10, on the formulation cf. Anālayo ("Women's" 81 note 63), the Haimavata (?) *Vinaya*, on the affiliation of this *Vinaya* cf. Anālayo ("Mahāpajāpati's" 270

This prediction of decline has not come true, leading to reinterpretations of the statement to mean a longer time span, such as five thousand years.²¹ This is not quite what the original statement says, for it clearly states that the right Dharma and the holy life will last for only five hundred years.²² Yet, not only has the Dharma itself outlasted longer than five hundred years, but the *bhikkhunī* order itself outlasted the prediction. Thus, the Chinese pilgrim Yijing (義淨), who travelled in India in the late 7th century, reports the existence of *bhikkhunīs* in India, noting their frugal life style.²³ Inscriptional evidence indicates that *bhikkhunīs* existed in India even in the 8th century.²⁴

According to the *Dīpavaṃsa* (16.38f) and the *Mahāvāṃsa* (19.65), during the reign of Asoka the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage was brought from India to Sri Lanka by a group of *bhikkhunīs* from India, headed by

note 11), T 1463 at T XXIV 803b17 (cf. also 818c5), the *Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya*, Roth (16,14), the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, T 1421 at T XXII 186a14, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, T 1451 at T XXIV 352a22, as well as MĀ 116 at T I 607b9, T 60 at T I 857c29, T 156 at T III 153c25, T 196 at T IV 159b8 and T 1478 at T XXIV 949b12. For a critical examination of the hypothesis by von Hinüber (“Foundation”) that the *bhikkhunī* order came into being only after the Buddha’s lifetime cf. Anālayo (“Theories”).

²¹ According to Mp I 87,3, during five successive periods of a thousand years the ability to attain the paths and fruits, etc., will disappear, followed by the disappearance of the keeping of the precepts, of the *tripiṭaka*, of the external marks of monasticism, and of the relics. Nattier (“Decline” 211) explains that “early in the first millennium C.E., however, as the Buddhist community became aware that this initial figure of five hundred years had already passed, new traditions extending the life span of the dharma beyond this limit began to emerge.” For a more detailed study of the motif of the decline of the Dharma cf. Nattier (*Once Upon* 27-64).

²² For a survey of the parallel versions cf. Anālayo (“Women’s” 81 note 62).

²³ T 2125 at T LIV 216b11.

²⁴ Skilling (“Note” 33) remarks that “the word *bhikṣuṇī* seems to vanish from the epigraphic vocabulary with the Pāla period.”

Saṅghamittā.²⁵ In Sri Lanka the *bhikkhunī* order appears to have disappeared at some point around the 11th century during a period of political turmoil that had decimated the entire monastic community.²⁶ Only the *bhikkhu* order was re-established from Burma.²⁷ Thus, while the *bhikkhunī*

²⁵ The expression used to refer to their higher ordination is just *pabbajīṃsu*, cf. Oldenberg (88,17+19), Dīp 16.38f. This usage appears to be similar to a general tendency in the early texts to use the expression *pabbajjā* as an umbrella term for both going forth and higher ordination, derived from the fact that during an initial period these were apparently given together; cf., e.g., Bhagvat (131), Dhirasekera (222), Dutt (147), Gokuldas (41), Gombrich (“Temporary” 42), Kieffer-Pülz (“buddhistische” 371), and Upasak (138); cf. also Kloppenborg. Thus, the indication by Mahinda at Dīp 15.76 that he could not give *pabbajjā* to women, Oldenberg (84,19): *akappiyā mahārāja itthipabbajjā bhikkhuno*, is best interpreted in the same light as a reference to going forth and higher ordination. Since a *bhikkhunī* order was in existence in India, the proper course of action to be taken was indeed to bring a group of *bhikkhunīs* from India so that they could give the going forth together with the required training and then participate in the performance of a dual ordination.

²⁶ Skilling (“Note” 34) reports that “a number of inscriptions of the 10th and early 11th centuries from Anurādhapura and vicinity refer in passing to ‘nunneries’ . . . it is logical to conclude that the inscriptions refer to *bhikkhunī-upassayas*.”

²⁷ Gunawardana (“Subtile” 37f) comments that it is “significant that, when attempts were made to revive Buddhism, monks living in Burma were requested to come back, but no such attempt to revive the order of nuns is to be found in the extant records . . . It is relevant to note that the new conditions in the order of Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka at this time were not very favourable to nuns.” Obeyesekere (5 and 13f) notes signs of what appears to reflect a shift towards an increasingly negative attitude towards women in Sri Lanka between the 5th and the 13th century. However, in his detailed study of inscriptional evidence for the existence of *bhikkhunīs*, Skilling (“Note” 36f) comments: “I am not aware of any incontrovertible inscriptional evidence for the existence of the order of nuns anywhere in South-east Asia . . . the information offered by inscriptions is scanty, late and ambiguous: it certainly attests to the existence of female renunciants of high status, but, since the word *bhikṣuṇī* does not occur, it does not conclusively prove the continued transmission of the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination. The inscriptions are from Pagan in Burma and from Cambodia; in addition, there is an even later and equally ambivalent reference from Java.” To provide one example, an inscription in Tin (151f) refers to a female who participated in a *paritta* ceremony, who elsewhere is qualified to be a “venerable” and who might have been the head of a monas-

order and the Dharma in general survived far beyond the period of five hundred years, what eventually did fall into decline was the *bhikkhunī* order in India and Sri Lanka, even though it took well over five hundred years for that to happen.

The problem of associating the very existence of the *bhikkhunī* order with an overall decline of the Dharma or the Buddha's dispensation is not only that it attributes to the Buddha a prediction that has not come true, but also that it stands in direct opposition to the passages surveyed above, which clearly see the *bhikkhunīs* as an integral part of the Buddha's dispensation. Such opposition is of significance also for members of the tradition. According to the canonical standards for evaluating the authenticity of a particular statement, enshrined in the four *mahāpadesas*, a proposition that conflicts with the remainder of the teachings should not be accepted.²⁸

Besides the passages just mentioned, the difficulties with the prediction that associates the existence of *bhikkhunīs* with the decline of the Dharma become even more evident on turning to a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya*. The passage in question reports an explanation given by the Buddha to Mahākassapa regarding what prevents the decline of the Dharma. The relevant part reads as follows:

Kassapa, here *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers and female lay followers dwell with regard and respect for the teacher, dwell with regard and respect for the Dharma, dwell with regard and respect for the community, dwell with regard and respect for the training, dwell with re-

tery. While this is highly suggestive, it is not conclusive. Thus, in evaluating the situation it needs to be kept in mind that, if *bhikkhunīs* able to transmit the lineage should not have been found in Burma, the question of importing the *bhikkhunī* lineage from Burma to Sri Lanka would not have arisen in the first place.

²⁸ DN 16 at DN II 123,30 and AN 4.180 at AN II 167,31; for a comparative study cf. Lamotte.

gard and respect for concentration. Kassapa, these are the five conditions that lead to the longevity of the Dharma, to its non-decay and to its non-disappearance.²⁹

What leads to a decline of the Dharma is thus when members of the four assemblies do not dwell with regard and respect for the teacher, etc. There is no question here of any of the four assemblies being in themselves responsible for decline by their mere existence. Much rather, it is the behavior of each that counts. Thus, according to this passage, the *bhikkhunīs* contribute to the continuity of the Dharma through their respectful behavior. It seems safe to conclude that such a presentation could only have been formulated at a time when the association between the very existence of *bhikkhunīs* and the decline of the Dharma had not yet come into being.

This passage from the *Samyutta-nikāya* does not stand alone. A discourse in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* similarly reports the Buddha addressing another of his *bhikkhu* disciples on the topic of the conditions that lead to the duration of the Dharma after his passing away. These conditions are if the four assemblies dwell with respect towards their teacher, the Dharma, the community, the training and towards each other.³⁰

Similar statements recur in another two discourses in the *Āṅguttara-nikāya* collection, differing only in relation to the type of objects towards which the four assemblies should be living with respect. Thus, the duration of the Dharma is assured if the *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunīs*, male lay followers and female lay followers dwell with regard and respect for the teacher, the Dharma, the *Saṅgha*, the training, heedfulness and helpful-

²⁹ SN 16.13 at SN II 225,8 to 225,14. A parallel to this discourse, SĀ 906 at T II 226c21, mentions only the monks; another parallel, SĀ² 121 at T II 419c18, speaks of respect without specifying the subject, so that in this case it is open to conjecture if only the monks are intended, or all four assemblies.

³⁰ AN 5.201 at AN III 247,20.

ness (towards each other), to which the other discourse adds regard and respect for concentration.³¹

In view of these passages that stand in direct contrast to associating the decline of the Dharma with the very existence of *bhikkhunīs*, it seems probable that this prediction is not authentic,³² even though it is found not only in the Pāli canon, but also in a range of parallel versions. The problems with this prediction are less evident if it is read within its narrative context. Here it is preceded by the Buddha's refusal to institute an order of *bhikkhunīs*, and accompanied by similes that describe a household with many women that is easily assailed and fields of rice and sugar cane that are afflicted by disease. Based on a comparative study of the different canonical accounts of the founding of the *bhikkhunī* order, I have argued for a different reading of these elements.³³

From the viewpoint of this different reading, the Buddha's refusal needs to be considered in the light of an alternative suggestion by him, reported in several versions, that women can live a celibate spiritual life, shaving their head and donning robes, but that they should do so without wandering around on their own. While this suggestion is not recorded in some versions—including the Theravāda account—these versions do report that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī and her followers shaved their heads and put on robes.³⁴ Such an action would be quite a natural one to take if the Buddha had given them permission to do so. Without some such permission, for Mahāpajāpatī to take such a course of action on her own initiative would be an act of open defiance. This would be difficult to reconcile with the fact that other passages indicate that she would

³¹ AN 6.40 at AN III 340,13 and AN 7.56 at AN IV 84,22.

³² Cf., e.g., Bancroft (82), Basham (23 note 3), Church (54), Falk ("Image" 106), Horner (*Women*, 105), Sponberg (13-16), and Williams.

³³ Anālayo ("Mahāpajāpatī's").

³⁴ The Theravāda version is found at Vin II 253,22.

have been a stream-enterer at the present junction of events. Thus, it seems probable that the versions which do not report such an explicit suggestion by the Buddha may have lost this during the long period of oral transmission.

From the viewpoint of this suggestion that Mahāpajāpati and her followers should better live a renunciant life without wandering around, the simile of the household that is easily assailed and of the fields afflicted by a disease then may originally have illustrated the problems ordained women might encounter in ancient Indian society if they were to wander around freely, since rape and similar abuse appear to have been far from uncommon at that time.³⁵

Be that as it may, the prediction of decline has had a lasting influence on the attitude towards *bhikkhunīs* in the Theravāda traditions. The establishing of a direct causal relationship between the existence of *bhikkhunīs* and the decline of the Dharma, presented in this passage, inevitably had an impact on the present controversy regarding a revival of the *bhikkhunī* ordination in the Theravāda traditions. In particular, the fear of decline is kept alive by the fact that the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order involves *bhikkhunīs* from the Mahāyāna tradition. In addition, be-

³⁵ In Anālayo (“Mahāpajāpati’s” 298) I surveyed textual evidence that points to the risk that the adoption of a wandering life style would have entailed for ordained women. The same suggests itself also from epigraphic material. In a discussion of inscriptional evidence from Sāñcī, Roy (211) observes that “72 out of 109 nuns [are] being identified in terms of the place of residence, whereas for the monks this form of identification is used only in 30 out of 106 places. This may have been due to greater restrictions placed on the movement of nuns than on monks.” That is, due to not being able to adopt an itinerant life style in the way this was possible for *bhikkhus*, the *bhikkhunīs* would naturally have more easily been identified in terms of their place of residence. While Roy relates this to restrictions within the Buddhist monastic community, it seems to me that this pattern—together with any ruling that a *bhikkhunī* should not travel alone, cf., e.g., Vin IV 229,35, whose promulgation is preceded by narrating a case of rape—point to the fact that in the ancient setting freely wandering as a *bhikkhunī* was risky.

cause of the belief that such a revival is impossible from the standpoint of Theravāda monastic jurisprudence, attempts made in this direction are seen as a violation of the *Vinaya* and thus another token of an impending decline of a tradition whose sense of identity is very much invested in the strict adherence to the *Vinaya*. In what follows, I will discuss these two aspects in turn.

The Mahāyāna Threat

Chinese sources report that in the early fifth century a group of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* established the ordination lineage in China.³⁶ We do not know what monastery these Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* came from.³⁷ We also do not know which *Vinaya* was used at the ordination in China,³⁸ nor is there any way of ascertaining whether subsequently all Chinese *bhikkhunīs* took ordination in the lineage established by the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs*. A Theravāda *Vinaya* was translated into Chinese in the late fifth

³⁶ T 2063 at T L 939c23; translated, e.g., in Tsai (54).

³⁷ Information about the need for a proper transmission of the *bhikkhunī* ordination lineage to China may well have become known via Fāxiǎn (法顯), who had stayed in Ceylon at the beginning of the 5th century; cf. T 2085 at T LI 864c10. In an oral setting like ancient Sri Lanka, the news of his arrival and his description of Buddhism in China would have quickly spread, making this common knowledge among the *bhikkhunīs* on the island, without any need for a special relationship between the *bhikkhunīs* who went to China and either Faxian himself or else the monastery where he stayed. While we do have evidence for a relationship between the Abhayagirivihāra and Java, cf. Gunawardana (*Robe* 280), this of course does not mean that the two groups of *bhikkhunīs* who went to China to transmit the ordination lineage must have come from that monastery.

³⁸ Heirman (“Buddhist” 615) observes that “since more than one *vinaya* was active in fifth century China, it seems impossible to say which *vinaya* tradition was used at the second ordination ceremony for nuns”; cf. also Deeg (150) and Heirman (“Can” 408).

century, but this was later lost.³⁹ Towards the beginning of the eighth century the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* was apparently imposed by imperial order,⁴⁰ hence from that period onwards all *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* in China had to follow this *Vinaya*.

In recent times, the order of *bhikkhunīs* has been re-established in Sri Lanka with the help of Chinese *bhikkhunīs* at the Bodhgayā ordination in 1998. While there had been similar ordinations earlier,⁴¹ it is since the 1998 Bodhgayā ordination that the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka has gained momentum and subsequent ordinations have been conducted in Sri Lanka itself. The fact that the Chinese *bhikkhunīs* who officiated at the Bodhgayā ordination were followers of the Mahāyāna is repeatedly raised as an objection against accepting the validity of this ordination lineage.

Apprehensions towards the Mahāyāna need of course be understood in the light of the sense of identity of the Sri Lankan Theravāda traditions as having defended itself against Mahāyāna intrusions throughout much of its early history. For a proper appreciation of such apprehensions, in what follows I will present some extracts from the *Nikāyaśaṅgraha*.⁴² This work, compiled in the 14th century by the head of

³⁹ T 2145 at T LV 13b17, translated by Deeg (147 note 68), and T 2153 at T LV 434a10. Heirman (“Vinaya” 192) explains that this “*vinaya* was translated during the reign of Emperor Wu (482–493) of the Southern Qi dynasty . . . after the death of Emperor Wu . . . the dynasty quickly went down. Ruthless and incompetent leaders succeeded one another. It was hardly a time to enlarge libraries under imperial sponsorship. This might account for the disappearance of the Pāli *Vinaya*.”

⁴⁰ Heirman (“Can” 414); cf. T 2061 at T L 793c26.

⁴¹ Examples would be the ordination in the USA in 1988, when Ayyā Khemā was ordained, and at Sarnath in 1996, when *bhikkhunī* Kusumā received ordination. On an early attempt in Thailand in the 1920ies cf. Kabilsingh (*Thai* 45-54) and Seeger (“bhikkhunī” 159f), on an attempt in Burma in the 1930ies cf. Kawanami (“Bhikkhunī” 231f).

⁴² For a study of the descriptions of Mahāyāna incidents in Sri Lanka in the *Nikāyaśaṅgraha* cf. Mori (12-33).

the monastic community, the *saṅgharāja* of Sri Lanka, provides a history of the development of Buddhism from its origin in India to Sri Lanka. The *saṅgharāja* explains that he composed “this religious history . . . for the purse of showing how religion prospers.”⁴³

The *Nikāyasaṅgraha* records that repeatedly “the Vaitulya doctrines [i.e. Mahāyāna teachings] were brought to Laṅkā . . . and were burnt to ashes by sincere Buddhist kings,”⁴⁴ reporting that at one point a Sri Lankan king even went so far as to be “placing guards round the coast to prevent the arrival of false priests in Laṅkā” who might spread such doctrines,⁴⁵ but nevertheless these doctrines “were clandestinely observed as a secret cult . . . [and] kept up by the foolish and the ignorant,” and a work called *Nilapaṭadarṣana* was also kept in circulation. It is the *saṅgharāja*’s account of how this *Nilapaṭadarṣana* came into being during the first half of the sixth century that is of particular interest for my present purpose. The story reads as follows:⁴⁶

At that time a wicked priest of the Sammittiya Nikāya, clever but impious, went to the house of a harlot at night, covering himself with a blue garment, and having slept there, returned at daybreak to the vihāra. His pupils, noticing his attire, asked him if that was a proper garment. Then, as many had seen the garment he had on, he lauded it and explained its propriety. The priests who were his devoted followers gave up their robes and donned blue garments. Then this man adopting as the three incomparable gems in the three worlds, vivacious harlots, enlivening drink, and the god of love, and worshipping them,

⁴³ Fernando (30).

⁴⁴ Fernando (17).

⁴⁵ Fernando (18).

⁴⁶ Fernando (18f).

despised the other gems as if they were crystal stone, and composed a work in *Grantha* called *Nīlapaṭadaṛṣana*, *i.e.*, the exposition of the blue robe. Thus says that work:

A favouring damsel is a gem;
A gem is cheering wine.
A gem is Love. These gems I serve.
No crystal gems are mine.

When thus the *Nīlapaṭadaṛṣana* began to be promulgated, King Śrīharsa sent for it and perused it. 'Fool, why not drink? Dost thou wish to go to hell? Spirit mixed with a pinch of salt is scarce even in heaven!'

Noticing this incoherent stanza, and realizing that this in sooth is no doctrine but a breach of religion which, if treated with indifference by a ruler such as he was, would lead to the ruin of Buddhism and to the damnation of many men, he determined to protect the religion of Buddha which is to endure for 5,000 years. Pretending to be convinced, he sent for the blue-robed brethren and their books, and having got them with the books into a house, he made a fire-offering of house and all. A few who escaped on that occasion, like a disease not entirely stamped out, still continued to don the same garments.

When evaluating the above description, it needs to be kept in mind that this story was recorded as a historical event by the chief *bhikkhu* of the Sri Lankan monastic community, the *saṅgharāja*. Thus, it can safely be assumed that it would have been taken as an accurate description of actual historical events by members of the same tradition.

For a pious Theravāda Buddhist, this story is rather shocking. The formal act of becoming a lay Buddhist involves taking refuge in the three

gems and committing oneself to the observance of the five precepts, the last of which requires abstaining from intoxicating drinks. This formal act of taking refuge and the five precepts is repeated periodically on days of religious observance, usually being administered by a Theravāda *bhikkhu* to the lay followers. The above passage involves an outrageous reinterpretation of the three gems that are the object of taking refuge—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha. It presents indulgence in liquor as being promoted by a *bhikkhu* from a non-Theravāda school, who thus does the precise opposite of what a Theravāda *bhikkhu* in the traditional setting is expected to do. This non-Theravāda *bhikkhu* also differs from Theravāda *bhikkhus* by wearing robes of a blue color,⁴⁷ an expedient to cover up the fact that he is not a true *bhikkhu* at all, as he frequents prostitutes. The narrative context in which the story of his behavior appears then gives the impression that in some way he is associated with the Mahāyāna.

While it can safely be assumed that modern day Theravādins in Sri Lanka for the most part would not envision the Mahāyāna tradition in such degenerate form, the fact that the tale from the *Nikāyasaṅgraha* is part of the “historical” tradition would make it unsurprising if an ordination carried out by *bhikkhunīs* who are followers of the Mahāyāna and wear grey colored robes is perceived as problematic.

Here it also needs to be kept in mind that Theravādins are not necessarily aware of the fact that the Chinese monastic tradition differs considerably from Buddhist clergy in Japan, where nowadays Mahāyāna priests can marry,⁴⁸ and do not necessarily abstain from the consump-

⁴⁷ Robes of a blue color are considered as not allowable in the Theravāda tradition, cf. Vin I 306,30 and the discussion in Thanissaro (*Monastic Code II*, 22).

⁴⁸ Cf. the study by Jaffe. Contrary to popular presumptions, the existence of married clergy is not a characteristic feature of the Mahāyāna traditions in general. In fact a comparable phenomenon did also manifest in Sri Lanka in the early Kandyan period, cf. Malalgoda (54-58).

tion of alcohol. From the viewpoint of a Theravāda traditionalists, then, the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination is easily seen as yet another Mahāyāna intrusion in line with what are believed to be historical antecedents, an intrusion that needs to be repulsed at all cost for the sake of preserving the “purity” of the Theravāda traditions.

The Bodhgayā *bhikkhunī* ordination was in fact carried out in a way that made it very clear that this was not going to be a conversion to the Mahāyāna.⁴⁹ The candidates received Theravāda style robes and bowls, and they did not take the bodhisattva vows that are usually given after completed ordination in the Mahāyāna traditions.⁵⁰ After completing the ordination, the new *bhikkhunīs* underwent a second ordination at which only Theravāda *bhikkhus* officiated. Thus, there can be little doubt that these *bhikkhunīs* did not have any intention to convert to the Mahāyāna.

⁴⁹ The need to make this as clear as possible would have suggested itself from the repercussions of the earlier ordinations. Bartholomeusz (147) reports that “Ayya Khemā eventually alienated many people who had originally supported her by becoming a ‘Mahāyāna bhikṣuṇī,’” i.e., by taking *bhikkhunī* ordination in 1988. LeVine and Gellner (186) report that the Nepalese *bhikkhunīs* who participated in the 1988 ordinations similarly were seen as converts to the Mahāyāna on their return to Nepal.

⁵⁰ De Silva (128) reports that the “ordination ceremony was conducted according to the procedures required by the Theravāda Vinaya . . . Theravāda monks were among the precept masters who conferred the higher ordination and . . . the nuns received the traditional robes and bowls in the same manner as the *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka.” Li (172) notes that when the time had come for taking the bodhisattva vow “the Theravādin *ācāryas* pointedly led all of their disciples out of the ordination hall and only returned for the closing ceremony two days later. They clearly had no intention of becoming Mahāyāna Buddhists.” Cheng (177) reports from her fieldwork that “none of my Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* informants considered themselves as Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* and none of them wore the robes of Chinese or Korean traditions.” Thus, Sasaki (189) is quite wrong when he presumes that “the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunīs* were initiated into Mahāyāna Buddhism by receiving the *upasampadā* ceremony held by the Taiwanese *bhikkhunīs*.”

Mahāyāna is in fact a religious vocation, not a monastic ordination tradition. The decision to become a follower of the Mahāyāna can be taken by a monastic or a lay person alike. The Mahāyāna is thus not a monastic lineage itself and, contrary to popular opinion, it is also not the result of a schism in the monastic community.⁵¹

The decision to embark on the Mahāyāna can thus to some degree be compared to the decision of following a meditative vocation like *vipassanāyāna*, where one opts for emphasizing the meditative cultivation of insight with comparatively little time and effort dedicated to the cultivation of tranquility, *samatha*. Both of these *yānas* are open to monastics and laity alike, and none of them requires ordination.

Of course, taking full ordination in the Mahāyāna traditions is usually followed by the formal taking of the bodhisattva vow, just as ceremonies for going forth in the Theravāda traditions incorporate an instruction on contemplation of the anatomical parts of the body.⁵² This does not mean, however, that the path of the bodhisattva or the developing of insight into the unattractive nature of the body are invariably being practiced by those so ordained, nor does the actual undertaking of these practices require becoming a monastic.

While the *bhikkhunīs* ordained at Bodhgayā did not take the bodhisattva vows, it needs to be kept in mind that the formal decision to embark on the path to future Buddhahood on its own does not make one a follower of the Mahāyāna. The path of the bodhisattva has for a long

⁵¹ On the nature of a schism cf., e.g., Bechert (“Importance”) and Hüsken (“Saṃghabhedā”).

⁵² Bizot (26). The candidate is taught to recite in forward and backward order the Pāli names of the first five anatomical parts from the standard listing given, e.g., in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*, MN 10 at MN I 57,16.

time been a recognized vocation in the Theravāda traditions,⁵³ and some renowned *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka occupying high ecclesiastical positions, like the late Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya or Nauyane Ariyadhamma, are well known for being practitioners of the bodhisattva path.

Thus, what the Chinese *bhikkhunīs* who officiated at the Bodhgayā ordination transmitted was an ordination lineage, not a vocation. The fact that they were followers of the Mahāyāna has no bearing on the validity or otherwise of their transmission of full ordination, just as the fact that a *bhikkhu* meditates on the anatomical constitution of the body and follows the *vipassanāyāna* has no bearing on his ability or inability to be part of the quorum required for giving full ordination to another *bhikkhu*.

In sum, the foregoing shows the background underlying apprehensions that the revival of the *bhikkhunī* ordination in some way results in an intrusion of the Mahāyāna into the Theravāda traditions, even though such apprehensions are not justified. The persistence of such apprehensions seems to me to keep alive a deeper sense of threat that stands in line with the general association of the existence of *bhikkhunīs* with the decline of the Dharma. By seeing the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order in line with a series of Mahāyāna incursions that had to be repelled in order to maintain the purity of the Theravāda lineage, the underlying sense of an impending decline continues.

⁵³ Cf., e.g., Chandawimala, Endo, Harvey, Rahula, Ratnayaka, Samuels, Skilling (“Three”), Spiro (64) and Tambiah (96f). For inscriptions in Theravāda countries that document the donor’s aspiration for Buddhahood cf., e.g., Assavavirulhakarn (175), Dohanian (20-25) and Luce (56).

The Theravāda Sense of Identity

By way of setting a background for my discussion of the legal aspects of the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order, in what follows I sketch the attitude towards *Vinaya* rules that is characteristic of traditional Theravāda monastics.⁵⁴ I believe this is a necessary basis for properly understanding the problems involved.

The term Theravāda can be translated as “Sayings of the Elders.” In the Ceylonese chronicle *Dīpavaṃsa* (4.6), the term designates the sayings that according to the traditional account were collected by the elders at the first communal recitation (*saṅgīti*) at Rājagaha.⁵⁵ The same term Theravāda in the *Dīpavaṃsa* and in the commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* then refers to the Ceylonese school that has preserved the Pāli version of these sayings collected at the first communal recitation, which both works set in opposition to other Buddhist schools in India.⁵⁶ Thus, central aspects of the Theravāda sense of identity are the Pāli canon as its sacred literature and Pāli as its liturgical language.⁵⁷

The rules and regulations given in the *Vinaya* part of the Pāli canon are therefore of central importance for monastic members of the Theravāda traditions. The commentary on the *Vinaya*, the *Samanta-*

⁵⁴ My presentation is not meant to imply that such attitudes are unique to Theravāda monastics.

⁵⁵ Cf. also Mhv 3.40. The following is an extract from a more detailed study of the term Theravāda in Anālayo (“Note”).

⁵⁶ Dīp 5.51f and Kv-a 3,13.

⁵⁷ Cf., e.g., Skilling (“Theravāda” 64), who explains that “the preservation, transmission, and study of the Pali canon and the use of Pāli as a liturgical language—by monastics and laity—is one distinctive and unifying feature of the Theravādin lineages.” Similarly Gombrich (*Theravāda* 3) points out that “hallmarks of Theravāda Buddhism are the use of Pali as its main sacred language and dependence on the Pali version of the Buddhist Canon as its sacred scripture.”

pāsādikā, declares that one's own opinion or even indications given in the commentarial tradition should not override the canonical presentation in the *Vinaya*.⁵⁸ In short, the Pāli *Vinaya* is the central reference point for Theravāda monasticism.

The degree to which adherence to the regulations in the *Vinaya* are perceived as crucial can be illustrated with the example of the ruling that a *bhikkhu* is permitted to have only three robes.⁵⁹ These are the two relatively long outer robes (*uttarāsaṅga* and *saṅghāti*), one of which is of double cloth and thus considerably warmer than the other, and the shorter inner garment (*antaravāsaka*). Due to the differences between these three robes,⁶⁰ it becomes somewhat inconvenient when one has just been washed and is still wet. The situation would be much easier if one were not restricted to these three robes and could have extra robes that can be worn while one of the three is left somewhere to dry.

The Theravāda approach in such a situation is not to amend the rule itself. Instead, a way of solving the situation is found within the parameters of keeping to the letter of the rule. This is done by giving another name altogether to a robe, calling it a “requisite cloth” (*parikkhāra-coḷa*) when formally taking possession of it. For requisite cloths no ownership limitations apply,⁶¹ hence in this way one can have more than the traditionally allowed three robes without breaking the rule. This way of

⁵⁸ Sp I 231,14, translated in Gethin (8). This applies of course only to the canonical presentation in the *Vinaya* of one's own tradition, not to canonical statements as recorded by other traditions, cf. Kieffer-Pülz (*Verlorene* 344-349).

⁵⁹ Vin I 289,1.

⁶⁰ As pointed out by Thanissaro (*Monastic Code I*, 514 and 565f) and Vajirañāṇavarorasa (2, 13), the original size of the outer robes appears to have been much shorter.

⁶¹ The rule permitting the *parikkhāra-coḷa* is found at Vin I 296,32; cf. the detailed discussion in Kieffer-Pülz (“Stretching” 35-45).

finding a solution is characteristic of the way Theravādin monastics deal with legal matters.

For the question of reviving the *bhikkhunī* order in the Theravāda traditions this attitude of Theravāda monastics has important ramifications. It should be clear that to propose that the *Vinaya* rules are better amended so as to allow for reviving the *bhikkhunī* ordination is unacceptable from a traditional viewpoint. Such a suggestion misses out on a central aspect of Theravāda identity, namely the strict adherence to the Pāli canon and in particular to the regulations in the way these have been preserved in the Pāli *Vinaya*. The *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* reports that at the first communal recitation at Rājagaha the *bhikkhus* decided to recite the *Vinaya* first, since they felt that the *Vinaya* is what gives life force to the Buddha's dispensation, whose endurance is ensured as long as the *Vinaya* endures.⁶²

The proposal to adjust the rules not only misses out on a central component of the Theravāda sense of identity, it also suggests something that within the traditional framework is not possible. The *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta* reports the Buddha highlighting a set of conditions that will ensure the prosperity of his disciples. According to one of these conditions, the *bhikkhus* should not authorize what has not been authorized and should not abrogate what has been authorized.⁶³ In other words, the community of *bhikkhus* does not have the right “to change the *vinaya*, but has to confine itself to practise according to it. It can be compared to policemen who have the duty to follow the law but not the right to change it.”⁶⁴

⁶² Sv I 11,17: *vinayo nāma buddhassa sāsanaṃ āyu, vinaye ṭhite sāsanaṃ ṭhitaṃ hoti.*

⁶³ DN 16 at DN II 77,3 (also in AN 7.21 at AN IV 21,19); for a survey of the parallel versions to DN 16 cf. Waldschmidt (*Überlieferung* 37ff).

⁶⁴ Watchara Ngamcitcaroen, quoted in Seeger (“Theravāda” 90). According to Sobisch (243), however, in legal matters like giving higher ordination “the fact that the saṅgha

The Theravāda attitude to be taken into account when attempting to find a legal solution is succinctly expressed in a statement which Bhikkhu Buddhādāsa is reported to have made at the Sixth Communal Recitation (*chaṭṭasaṅgāyana*) in Burma in 1956. He explains that Theravādins are “against the revoking, changing or altering of the original even in its least form . . . we have no warrant of addition in such a manner that would make Buddhism develop according to . . . circumstances . . . we are afraid of doing such a thing . . . by means of this very coward-

has autonomy and the authority to decide the matter is probably unchallenged.” As far as I can see he bases himself on two points: 1) The suggestion by Huxley (157) that the motion reported at Vin II 288,²³ not to implement the Buddha’s permission to abrogate the minor rules implies in principle “that the *saṅgha* has the power to change the rules, though they are not in fact exercising it. Thus, it shifts the grundnorm from the Buddha to the First Council.” It seems to me that the point of the tale is rather that the *bhikkhus* were unable to come to an agreement about what rules this permission should be applied to and that Mahākassapa voiced apprehension of the reaction by laity on hearing of a change of the rules. This then led to the decision not to implement the explicit permission given by the Buddha. The episode as a whole thus does not involve a basic shift that invests the *saṅgha* with the legal authority earlier held by the Buddha. Much rather it emphasizes the need to adhere closely to the ruling believed to have been given by the Buddha, so much so that uncertainty about its precise implications makes it preferable to avoid any change. 2) The second point seems to be the assumption by Sobisch (239 and 241) that, given that “it is nowhere mentioned that earlier full ordinations of monks were invalidated through the introduction of new, additional rules regarding the process of ordination by the Buddha. . . . In other words, the new contents of the procedure are not essential for the materialization of the vow [i.e., of the higher ordination], because if that were the case, the earlier procedures could not have materialized a valid vow.” It seems to me that this line of reasoning does not fully take into account a basic legal principle in the *Vinaya*, according to which a new regulation applies only to cases that arise after its promulgation, not to what happened before the rule in question came into being. The earlier ordinations remained valid simply because they were carried out according to the rules that had been legally binding at that time.

ice, Theravada is still remaining in its pristine form of the original doctrine. May we be in cowardice in this way forever.”⁶⁵

Thus, it is not particularly meaningful to argue for membership in the Theravāda traditions and at the same time request changes that members of these traditions will view as directly opposed to the very way the Theravāda traditions ensure their continuity. Such a suggestion not only fails to understand basic principles of the Theravāda traditions, it even actively foments the feeling of impending decline, since in the eyes of traditional Theravādins this can appear to be an attempt to erode the very principle that Theravāda traditionalists would consider as vital for the survival of the tradition.⁶⁶

Here I think it also needs to be kept in mind that the issue in question is not simply one of gender equality. Considerations of human rights and an awareness of the detrimental effects of discrimination are of course important values in modern days,⁶⁷ but from the viewpoint of tradition these are not decisive criteria in relation to the question of membership in the Theravāda monastic traditions. That is, the problem is not just that male chauvinists want to keep women in an inferior position.⁶⁸ Much of the problem is rather the apprehension that the legal

⁶⁵ Quoted in Seeger (“bhikkhuni” 158 note 11). As Chamsanit (298) notes, “the act of holding on to the letter of the text itself forms a crucial part of the identity of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand.”

⁶⁶ Hüsken (“Gotamī” 223) reports that in traditional monastic circles “the recent attempt to re-establish the order of nuns is equated with a breach of monastic rules.”

⁶⁷ Cf. the survey of opinions in this respect in Schednek (238-242), and on the problem of discrimination in particular Goodwin.

⁶⁸ Cf., e.g., Sobisch (242), who comments on opposition to the revival of *bhikkhuni* ordination, “arguments and sentiments reveal the actual motivation of the denial, namely to locate fitting female activities in social work (instead of asceticism and renunciation), family life, and providing of alms for the monks. Instead, women dare to become an economic threat to the monks as eligible receivers of alms!” If this were indeed the main motivation, one would expect those who oppose the revival of *bhikkhuni* ordina-

principles, which form the basis for the sense of identity of the Theravāda monastic traditions, are being jeopardized.

By way of illustration, I would like to turn briefly to the comparable case of the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition, where in recent times women have also received higher ordination from Chinese *bhikkhunīs*, yet acceptance from tradition has remained a controversial issue. At the conclusion of a conference held in 2007 at Hamburg University on this issue, the Dalai Lama gave permission to these *bhikkhunīs* to perform the monastic rituals based on the Dharmaguptaka code of rules, translated into Tibetan.⁶⁹ While on the surface this permission appears to accommodate the aspirations of these women, in terms of monastic reality it actually sets them apart from the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition of which they wish to be part.⁷⁰ In fact, to my knowledge this permission has so far not been put into practice. The point I intend to make is that the issue at stake is not just the bare fact that a woman follower of the Tibetan tradition wishes to take higher ordination. The problem rather lies with the integration of such a *bhikkhunī* into the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition.

Applied to the present case, I doubt that Theravāda traditionalists would object to a woman who wants to become a *bhikkhunī* taking the Chinese Dharmaguptaka ordination and subsequently wearing their style of robes used and participating in their monastic rituals. Tradition-

tion to be at the same time also opposed to the existence of *thila shins*, *dasasil mātās*, and Thai *mae chis*, which is not the case.

⁶⁹ Dalai Lama (268-272).

⁷⁰ Heirman (“Buddhist” 625) comments that “reciting the Dharmaguptaka procedures in Tibetan, on the one hand brings the Dharmaguptaka ceremonies . . . closer to a Tibetan-speaking community, but on the other hand draws a clear line between the (Tibetan) Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition and the Dharmaguptaka tradition. It does not allow women to enter the Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic organization, but sets them apart. It can therefore be doubted whether this proposal is acceptable to the Buddhist women who plead for an institutionally equal position within the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition.”

alists would just not recognize her as a Theravāda *bhikkhunī*. Thus, the problem is not merely that a Theravāda woman wants to become a *bhikkhunī*. The question is rather if such a *bhikkhunī*, ordained in the Dharmaguptaka tradition, will be recognized as a member of the Theravāda community.

This is thus a matter that needs to be resolved within the parameters of the Theravāda traditions, in particular from the viewpoint of the Pāli *Vinaya*. While calls for gender equality, etc., have of course an influence in the case of legal ambiguity, they are in themselves not decisive, since acceptance has to be based on the legal principles recognized in the Theravāda traditions.

Therefore, if the rules in the Theravāda *Vinaya* render a revival of the *bhikkhunī* order legally impossible, then such a revival stands little chances of meeting with approval by the traditionalists. At the same time, however, as the example of the three robes has shown, if a revival can be done without direct infringement of the rules, then members of the tradition also have no real basis for refusing to accept that the *bhikkhunī* order has been resurrected.

With this proviso in mind, I now turn to the legal aspects involved. My discussion concentrates on the canonical *Vinaya* regulations only, in line with the injunction given in the *Samantapāsādikā* that one's own opinion or the commentarial tradition should never override the canonical injunctions in the *Vinaya* itself.⁷¹ These *Vinaya* injunctions are the final standard to evaluate if a revival of the *bhikkhunī* order in the Theravāda traditions is legally possible or not.

⁷¹ Sp I 231,14, translated in Gethin (8).

Dual Ordination

The chief question in the eyes of tradition regarding the validity of the dual ordination carried out at Bodhgayā is whether or not the officiating female preceptors can be recognized as *bhikkhunīs* from a Theravāda viewpoint. One objection here concerns the uncertainty whether the *bhikkhunī* lineage has been passed on without interruption in China.

However, the same uncertainty applies equally to the *bhikkhu* lineages in South and Southeast Asia, since it is in principle impossible to provide positive proof that the transmission has always been passed on in an unbroken manner.⁷²

Another problem is related to the establishing of the ritual boundary for ordination, the *sīmā*. The Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* lists more markers for the establishing of a *sīmā* than the Theravāda *Vinaya*.⁷³ This opens up the possibility that such a *sīmā* marker has at some time been

⁷² As Kieffer-Pülz (“Presuppositions” 219) points out, from the viewpoint of tradition the legitimacy of higher ordination “depends on an uninterrupted ordination lineage going back to the time of the Buddha and on the acceptance of the legal procedures used to perform these ordinations. It is difficult, if not impossible, for any of the existing traditions to authenticate both points. Within a tradition, this is generally not a problem, since a tradition normally accepts its own lineage as pure, even if it cannot produce an uninterrupted list of names. As soon as one tradition views another tradition’s lineage and seeks to evaluate it, however, problems can arise.” Hartmann (26) comments that “some kind of positive proof . . . is *a priori* unobtainable for a historical process that spans 2,500 years.” When “Vinaya masters assert the unbroken continuity of their own ordination lineage while casting doubt on the integrity of the Chinese tradition, they . . . employ rationality and belief at the same time, but for different ends—rationality for doubting the other tradition and belief for accepting their own.”

⁷³ For a detailed study cf. Chung and Kieffer-Pülz; cf. also Gangopadhyay (21-23); the markers for the *sīmā* are listed in Vin I 106,5, the corresponding section in the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* is T 1428 at T XXII 819b18.

used in the past, which from a Theravāda viewpoint would render the ordinations carried out in such a *sīmā* invalid.⁷⁴

Similar to the question of whether the *bhikkhunī* lineage had an unbroken transmission, the use of markers for the *sīmās* during past ordinations in China can at present no longer be ascertained. Among Theravāda countries there are also differences in this respect, as in Thailand an additional ninth marker is recognized,⁷⁵ which is without support in the Theravāda *Vinaya* and commentaries.

The formulations used for the ceremonial acts required for establishing the *sīmā* also differ between the Dharmaguptaka and the Theravāda traditions. Unlike the issue of the markers, where it is uncertain if the “wrong” markers have been employed, a difference in formulation must have affected the ordinations carried out in China.

Some minor differences can also be found between the formulations related to the *sīmā* used within the Theravāda traditions themselves.⁷⁶ The Pāli formulas used in the Theravāda traditions to ensure the correctness of legal transactions in general are in fact all the outcome of

⁷⁴ Regarding the concern in some Theravāda monastic circles towards ensuring that the *sīmā* is not invalidated in any way, which would in turn invalidate the legal act carried out in the ritual space established through the *sīmā*, Vajirañāṇavarorasa (3, 50 note 10) dryly comments: “It has been heard that in Burma the electricity wires are disconnected if a sanghakamma will be performed. This leads one to think of the air which flows into the *sīmā*. Should it too be disconnected?”

⁷⁵ Kieffer-Pülz (*Sīmā* 188) explains that this mark is called *indakhīla* and is buried in the earth.

⁷⁶ Kieffer-Pülz (*Sīmā* 40f) notes that the Thai tradition differs from the Ceylonese and Burmese tradition in the formulation of three of the five *kammavācās* that are related to the *sīmā*.

some degree of development, since the Buddha and his monastic disciples did not speak the language to which we now refer to as Pāli.⁷⁷

Regarding the canonical attitude towards language, according to a passage in the *Vinaya* the Buddha encouraged the use of *sakāya nirut-tiyā*, “own language”, for memorizing his instructions.⁷⁸ While the commentarial explanation understands this to refer to the Buddha’s own language,⁷⁹ it seems to me more probable that this refers to “one’s own language” and thus encourages the use of local languages for the memorization and teaching of the Dharma. Such an understanding of this passage would be in line with an injunction in the *Araṇavibhaṅga-sutta* and its parallel against insisting on a particular local language usage.⁸⁰

The commentarial tradition, however, considers correct pronunciation of Pāli as essential. A canonical starting point for such emphasis on accurate pronunciation during legal proceedings is found in the *Parivāra*. This work, generally considered to be the latest part of the canonical *Vinaya*, indicates that a legal act becomes invalid if there is a “garbling of the recitation,” *sāvanaṃ hāpeti*.⁸¹ The commentary on this stipulation then lists a series of possible mispronunciations that would invalidate the proclamation of the legal act, the *kammavācā*.⁸²

⁷⁷ Cf., e.g., the discussion in Norman (“Dialects”).

⁷⁸ Vin II 139,15; the implications of this passage have been discussed by, e.g., Brough, Edgerton (1-2), Geiger (5), Lévi (441-447), Levman, Lin Li-Kouang (217-227), Norman (“Middle” 122-124), Norman (“Dialects” 128-130), Norman (*Philological* 60), and Thomas (253-254).

⁷⁹ Sp VI 1214,18.

⁸⁰ MN 139 at MN III 234,31 and its parallels MĀ 169 at T I 703a4, SHT II 163a, Waldschmidt (*Sanskrihandschriften* 15), and D 4094 ju 46a5 or Q 5595 tu 50a2.

⁸¹ Vin V 221,2 and von Hinüber (“Buddhist Law” 201).

⁸² Sp VII 1399,3, which has been edited, translated and studied by von Hinüber (“Buddhist Law”).

Regarding the emphasis in the commentary on correct pronunciation, von Hinüber (“Buddhist Law” 228) comments, “it is a long way from the simple *ehi-bhikkhu-upasampadā* ascribed to the Buddha himself (Vin I 12,13 foll.) to a *kammavācā*, the wording and pronunciation of which have been laid down to the last *akṣara* [letter]. Here it is perhaps not too far-fetched to assume the influence of the recitation of Vedic texts . . . for, in the same way as the magical effect of the Vedic *mantras* is guaranteed only if not even the slightest mistake has been made in pronouncing them, likewise the validity of the *kammavācās* is established in Buddhist law by exactly the same accuracy in pronunciation.”

Such an insistence on accuracy in pronunciation can in fact become self-defeating. An example, directly related to the ordination procedure,⁸³ would be the practice of replacing the actual proper name of the candidate and the preceptor—which during higher ordination need to be announced—with the names *Nāga* and *Tissa* respectively.⁸⁴ This was apparently done to avoid mispronunciation when their real proper names have to be declined in accordance with Pāli grammar.⁸⁵ This custom is reflected in the *Vimativinodanīṭikā*, a work probably of the 12th to 13th century, and still in use today in the Theravāda traditions.

⁸³ Vin I 94,22 reports the procedure, which requires announcement of the two names to the assembled community and also an interrogation of the candidate during which he has to state his name and the name of his preceptor; Vin I 93,1 allows the use of the clan’s name instead of the personal name of the preceptor for the motion.

⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion cf. Kieffer-Pülz (“Nāgas”).

⁸⁵ *Vajirañāṇavarorasa* (3, 117f) explains that “when giving *upasampadā* had become so widespread that it was being done in sanghas which did not know Pāli, even changing the case-endings for names in the *kammavācā* to accord with Pāli grammar was difficult. Later *Ācariyas* thus set down a method . . . the name of every *upasampadāpekkha* was given as *Nāga*; whatever the *upajjhāya*’s name may have been, the convention was established at that time that the name *Tissa* was recited. After *upasampadā*, the name of the new *bhikkhu* would then be changed to something else.”

This usage is not entirely unproblematic. According to the *Parivāra*, two out of five reasons that render an ordination invalid are if the motion does not mention the candidate or the preceptor by name.⁸⁶ Thus, the attempt to ensure correct pronunciation during the legal act of ordination has resulted in a procedure that in itself to some degree undermines that very legality.⁸⁷ Of course, ordinations done in this way are valid in as much as using the surrogate names had earlier been agreed on by the participating monastics. Once everyone who took part in the ordination knew that for the duration of the legal act the candidate was going to be referred to by the name *Nāga* and the preceptor by the name *Tissa*, the ordination is valid.

However, the principle that establishes such validity is to give importance to the meaning over the letter. This in turn makes it difficult for those who are ordained in this way to reject another ordination because it is not carried out in Pāli, but in a local language like Chinese. Such a rejection gives importance to the letter over the meaning.

In fact the original intent of the ordination procedure is for the act to be understood, as evident in particular in the various questions that the candidate is asked to ensure his or her suitability. Present day practice for male Theravāda candidates, who often do not know Pāli, requires remembering how many questions need to be replied to in Pāli

⁸⁶ Vin V 220,25: *vatthuṃ na parāmasati . . . puggalaṃ na parāmasati . . . imehi pañcah' ākārehi ñattito kammāni vipajjanti*. The commentary, Sp VII 1398,1 explains that *vatthuṃ na parāmasati*, the “matter is not touched on,” takes place when the candidate’s name is not pronounced, *tassa nāmaṃ na gaṇhāti*. Similarly, *puggalaṃ na parāmasati*, the “person is not touched on,” happens when the preceptor’s name is not pronounced, *yo upasampadāpekkhasa upajjhāyo, taṃ na parāmasati, tassa nāmaṃ na gaṇhāti*; on the significance of *gaṇhāti* in such contexts cf. Horner (*Book 119* note 1).

⁸⁷ Vajirañāṇavarorasa (3, 118) comments that “Ācariyas who are strict are likely to find fault with the fact that the persons given name is not used, holding that this is the same as not specifying the name.”

with a negation, *n' atthi bhante*, and at what point one needs to switch to the affirmative mode, *āma bhante*. While this fulfills the ritual requirements of the Theravāda traditions, it no longer accomplishes the original function of ascertaining the candidate's qualifications for higher ordination.

The above surveyed legal problems regarding the *sīmā* as well as the proper language and pronunciation of the formulas for legal acts in a way converge on the issue of whether the officiating female preceptors are *nānasaṃvāsa*, of “different community,” vis-à-vis Theravāda monastics. Being of a “different community” would make it impossible for them to carry out legal acts that will be recognized as valid by traditional members of the Theravāda.

In the canonical *Vinaya*, the notion of *nānasaṃvāsa* refers to the case of a fully ordained monastic who disagrees with the community where he lives on whether a particular act constitutes an offence. The resultant discord on the implication of the *Vinaya* rules results either in this monastic, together with his fully ordained followers, carrying out legal acts independent from the community, or else the community banning him or them from participating in their legal acts by an act of suspension.⁸⁸

The status of being one who is *nānasaṃvāsa* thus comes into existence because of a dispute about the interpretation of the rules, wherefore it can be resolved by settling the dispute. Once there is agreement on the interpretation of the *Vinaya* regulations, those who were *nānasaṃvāsa* become again *samānasaṃvāsa*, part of the same community. This is different from the case when a fully ordained monastic is no

⁸⁸ Vin I 340,30; cf. the discussion in Kieffer-Pülz (*Sīmā* 53f).

longer in communion, *asaṃvāsa*, because of having committed a *pārājika* offence. In this case full rehabilitation is not considered possible.⁸⁹

To my knowledge there is no evidence that there has been a dispute on *Vinaya* rules between the Theravāda and the Dharmaguptaka monastic traditions. In fact these two monastic traditions appear to be simply the product of geographical separation.

However, the rules for *bhikkhunīs* in the two traditions differ. Besides differences in formulation, the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* has more rules for *bhikkhunīs* than the Theravāda *Vinaya*.⁹⁰ From a traditional Theravāda viewpoint the two traditions are thus de facto *nānasaṃvāsa*, since they no longer have the same rules to adhere to.

This condition is unlike the situation between *bhikkhus* in South and Southeast Asia, who despite differences in their vernaculars, the color of their robes, etc., all rely on what is essentially the same *Vinaya* text. This has enabled monastics of Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand to import *bhikkhu* ordination lineages from each other since, in spite of local variations, these different lineages were considered to belong to the same overall monastic lineage. The present case of importing *bhikkhunī* ordination involves not only more drastic differences in vernaculars and style of robes, but also a different set of *pātimokkha* rules.

Such a situation does not have a proper canonical precedent, since the original formation of the rules took place before the coming into being of the different Buddhist schools. A related precedent would

⁸⁹ Pace Clarke (“When” 135), I doubt that *asaṃvāsa* in such contexts refers to communion with a local community only, cf. Anālayo (“Case” 418 note 42).

⁹⁰ As can be seen from the comparative study and translation in Kabilsingh (*Bhikkhunī*) and Kabilsingh (*Comparative*), minor differences in formulation and in the sequence of listing already manifest with the *pārājika* rules, and in the case of the *pācittiya* rules the overall number of rules differs.

be the situation of having become *nānasaṃvāsa* due to a disagreement about the interpretation of the rules. From this viewpoint, then, perhaps the difference in the rules could be overcome if the *bhikkhunīs* decide to follow the Theravāda *Vinaya* code of rules and thereby become *samānasaṃvāsa*.

The ordination by the Theravāda *bhikkhus* carried out after the dual ordination at Bodhgayā could then be seen as an expression of the acceptance of these newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* by the Theravāda community with which they wish to be in communion, *samānasaṃvāsa*. This would be in line with the procedure for settling a dispute about monastic rules that has led to the condition of being *nānasaṃvāsa*.⁹¹ In this way, the ordination by the Theravāda *bhikkhus* would have had the function of what in the modern tradition is known under the technical term of *dalhikamma*, literally “making strong,” a formal act with which a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhus* who has/have received ordination elsewhere gain the recognition of a particular community of which he/they wish to be part.⁹²

This completes my survey of legal problems, during which I have focused on the canonical viewpoint only. On examining the legal situation from this perspective, the situation is clearly complex. While with goodwill and flexibility the rules and regulations in the *Vinaya* could be interpreted as not invalidating the *bhikkhunī* lineage that from Sri Lanka has been transmitted to China and now is being brought back to Sri

⁹¹ Vin I 340,34 explains that there are two ways of becoming *samānasaṃvāsaka*. The first is when “on one’s own one makes oneself to be of the same community,” *attanā vā attānaṃ samānasaṃvāsakaṃ* (B°: *samānasaṃvāsaṃ*) *karoti*, i.e., one becomes part of the community through one’s own decision, namely by adopting the view held by the rest of the community regarding the rules. The second takes place on being reinstated by the community after one had been suspended for not seeing an offence, not atoning for it, not giving it up. For the present case, the first of these two alternatives would seem to be the relevant option.

⁹² Cf., e.g., Kieffer-Pülz (“Presuppositions” 223f, esp. note 16).

Lanka again, I think it is also clear that the arguments in this respect are not compelling. Keeping in mind that traditional circles will of course not rely only on the *Vinaya* itself, but also on its interpretations in the commentaries, etc., I think it is obvious that such acceptance is difficult and reservations in this respect are not surprising.

The Theravāda monastic lineages are seen by their members as having ensured their longstanding continuity through strictly adhering to central legal principles. One of these is the correct establishing of the ritual space for ordination through the *sīmā*. The proper establishing of the *sīmā* is a matter of recurrent controversy among Theravāda *bhikkhu* communities that can easily lead to the creation of different ordination lineages that no longer recognize each other's ordinations as valid.

The use of correctly pronounced Pāli as the ritual language is a matter of similar concern, to the degree that in some monastic traditions the act of taking refuge at the time of going forth has to be done twice by varying the pronunciation of the last letter, the *niggahīta*, in the case of those terms that stand in the accusative. These are the object of refuge—*buddham* / *dhammam* / *saṅgham*—and the term “refuge” itself, *saraṇam*.⁹³ Thus, taking refuge in the Buddha, for example, needs to be pronounced once in the form *buddham saraṇam gacchāmi*, and during another recitation of the refuge formula instead in the alternative form *buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. In the eyes of tradition, incorrect pronunciation of the formula for taking refuge would jeopardize the legal validity of the going forth.

Besides the problem of establishing the proper ritual space and using the proper ritual language,⁹⁴ there is also the alien impression that

⁹³ Bizot (49) and Kieffer-Pülz (*Verlorene* 1715-1718).

⁹⁴ On the importance of taking into account ritual requirements alongside legal problems when attempting to revive the *bhikkhunī* order cf. also Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz

inevitably results from encountering monastics who wear substantially different robes and rely on a different *Vinaya* text. These factors together make it quite understandable that it is difficult for traditionalists to accept the validity of the ordinations given by *bhikkhunīs* from the Chinese or other monastic lineages, who do follow a different *Vinaya* and thus a different set of rules.

The issue of the validity of higher ordination is also a contentious issue among *bhikkhus* in the Theravāda traditions, even though these rely on the same *Vinaya* and code of rules. In Thailand, for example, members of the Dhammayuttikanikāya do not accept the validity of the other monastic lineages, referred to as the Mahānikāya. This is not a major problem, however, because the *bhikkhus* of the respective *nikāyas* simply carry out ordinations separately, and hence they do not need the other's recognition.

For the *bhikkhunī* ordination to grow roots in the Theravāda traditions, however, the matter is different, since to ordain a *bhikkhunī* the cooperation of a quorum of *bhikkhus* is required. Thus, without at least some of the *bhikkhus* in the country accepting the validity of *bhikkhunī* ordination and being willing to participate in the ordination ceremony, it becomes difficult to carry out such ordinations.⁹⁵ At present, to my knowledge, it is only in Sri Lanka that a section of the *bhikkhu* community openly cooperates in *bhikkhunī* ordinations.⁹⁶ Without such coopera-

(266): “legal acts and ritual performances are closely related yet different concepts, and in the case of the Buddhist monastic discipline they are two sides of the same coin.”

⁹⁵ I take it that this is also the rationale behind the statement that *bhikkhunīs* cannot create a schism, Vin II 204,4. Doing so they would simply cut themselves off from the *bhikkhu* community and thus their lineage would no longer be sustainable to future generations of *bhikkhunīs*.

⁹⁶ This is the Dambulla group (formerly part of the Siam Nikāya) around Inamaluwe Sumangala, on which cf. Abeyesekara (174-200), and *bhikkhus* from the Amarapūranikāya according to Kieffer-Pülz (“Wiedereinrichtung” 37).

tion by the *bhikkhus*, the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination is not sustainable in the long run.

In light of the above surveyed problems that make it difficult for traditionalists to accept the validity of the Dharmaguptaka *bhikkhunī* lineage, it needs to be ascertained if the cooperation of the Chinese *bhikkhunīs* is indeed an indispensable requirement for reviving the Theravāda *bhikkhunī* order. This is the question to which I turn next, namely the issue of single ordination, of *bhikkhunīs* being ordained by *bhikkhus* alone.

Single Ordination

The account of the coming into existence of the order of *bhikkhunīs* in the *Cullavagga* of the Theravāda *Vinaya* reports that Mahāpajāpati Gotamī was ordained by accepting eight principles to be respected, the eight *garudhammas*.

Now the attribution of the promulgation of these eight *garudhammas* to the Buddha at this juncture of events is rather doubtful from an academic viewpoint.⁹⁷ However, in what follows I need to consider the *Vinaya* description of events simply at its face value. This description, in the way it has come down in the canonical *Vinaya*, forms the basis for legal decisions in the Theravāda traditions. Therefore my discussion re-

⁹⁷ Doubts about the authenticity of the *garudhammas* have been voiced by, e.g., Anālayo (“Women’s” 82-86), Chung (“Buddhist” 87), Chung (“Ursprung” 13), Hüsken (“Eight”), Hüsken (*Vorschriften* 346-60), Kieffer-Pülz (“buddhistische” 378 note 378), Kusumā (“Inaccuracies” 8), Shih (*Controversies* 420f), Sujato (51-81), and Verma (73).

garding the bearing of the *Vinaya* on the present issue has to stay within the parameters of the canonical account.⁹⁸

The account of the evolution of *bhikkhunī* ordination in the Theravāda *Vinaya* begins with the Buddha proclaiming to Ānanda the eight principles to be respected, *garudhammas*, the accepting of which would constitute Mahāpajāpatī's higher ordination. One of these principles to be respected stipulates that *bhikkhunī* ordination requires a two-year training period as a *sikkhamānā*, after which higher ordination should be requested from both communities, that is, from the communities of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs*.⁹⁹ On being informed by Ānanda of these eight principles, Mahāpajāpatī happily agrees.

Mahāpajāpatī then approaches the Buddha to ask how she should proceed in relation to her female followers, whereon the Buddha prescribes that the *bhikkhus* can perform *bhikkhunī* ordination.¹⁰⁰ Next Mahāpajāpatī informs the Buddha that her followers, having now become *bhikkhunīs*, think she has not been properly ordained. Her followers have pointed out to her that the Buddha had declared that *bhikkhunī* ordination should be given by the *bhikkhus*.¹⁰¹ In reply, the Buddha clarifies that Mahāpajāpatī's higher ordination has already been granted through her acceptance of the eight principles to be respected (*garudhamma*).

When female candidates feel ashamed on being formally interrogated by *bhikkhus* regarding their suitability for higher ordination—which involves questions about the nature of their genitals and men-

⁹⁸ Lest I be misunderstood, my discussion does not imply that I believe events happened exactly in the way they have been recorded in the *Vinaya*.

⁹⁹ Vin II 255,19.

¹⁰⁰ Vin II 257,7.

¹⁰¹ Vin II 257,10.

stration—this task is passed on to the *bhikkhunīs*. Therefore the Buddha prescribes that the *bhikkhus* can ordain *bhikkhunīs* who have previously been “higher ordained on one side” (by the *bhikkhunīs*) and who have “cleared” themselves (by undergoing the formal interrogation before the community of *bhikkhunīs*).¹⁰²

When a *bhikkhunī* who has been “higher ordained on one side” and “cleared” herself is unable to approach the community of *bhikkhus* due to some impending danger—the background story speaks of men getting ready to waylay a former courtesan who has been ordained by the *bhikkhunīs* and now needs to approach the *bhikkhu* community to complete the dual ordination—a messenger can be sent on her behalf to the community of *bhikkhus* in her stead.¹⁰³ So far these are the key elements from the *Cullavagga*.

A proper appreciation of the implications of the above account requires a study of the significance of the *garudhammas*. The term *garudhamma* itself carries distinct meanings in the *Vinaya*. It occurs within the body of the description of the fifth principle to be respected (*garudhamma* 5), according to which a *bhikkhunī* who has committed a grave offence (*garudhamma*) needs to undergo penance (*mānatta*) for half a month in both communities.¹⁰⁴ Clearly here the term refers to a *saṅghādisesa* offence—the second gravest offence recognized in the *Vinaya*—which requires the undergoing of penance (*mānatta*). Subsequent to that, the offending monastic has to go through an act of rehabilitation called *abbhāna* in front of a community consisting of at least twenty fully ordained members. In other words, a *saṅghādisesa* offence is a rather grave offence, a breach of the rules that merits temporary suspension of the offender.

¹⁰² Vin II 271,34.

¹⁰³ Vin II 277,11.

¹⁰⁴ Vin II 255,17.

This is, however, not the sense the term *garudhamma* carries when referring to the eight principles to be respected themselves.¹⁰⁵ This in fact becomes evident right away with the first of these eight principles (*garudhamma* 1), according to which a senior *bhikkhunī* should behave respectfully towards a junior *bhikkhu*. Transgressing against such behavioral etiquette is not grave enough to merit temporary suspension. The *Vinaya* in fact records several cases where some *bhikkhus* behave in an inappropriate manner, whereon the Buddha explicitly enjoins that the *bhikkhunīs* should no longer pay respect to them.¹⁰⁶

The same would hold for the eighth principle (*garudhamma* 8), which stipulates that *bhikkhunīs* are not permitted to criticize *bhikkhus*. The *Vinaya* reports that when *bhikkhunīs* complain about the inappropriate behavior of *bhikkhus*,¹⁰⁷ the Buddha promulgates a rule to prevent

¹⁰⁵ Cf. the discussion in Heirman (“Gurudharma”), Horner (*Book* 66 note 1), Nolot (*Règles* 401-404) and—in reply to Hüsken (“Legend” 53)—Nolot (“Studies” 135f note 52), as well as Sujato (70).

¹⁰⁶ Vin II 262,9, which applies to cases where a *bhikkhu* (or *bhikkhus*) sprinkles muddy water on a *bhikkhunī* (or *bhikkhunīs*), exposes his body, or tries to flirt with a *bhikkhunī*, etc. The expression used here is *avandiyo kātabbo*, “should be made one to whom no homage is paid.” The regulation for the first *garudhamma* at Vin II 255,7 is more detailed, as it speaks of *abhivādanam paccuṭṭhānam añjalikammaṃ sāmīcikkammaṃ kātabbam*, that is, the *bhikkhunī* “should pay homage to, rise up [from her seat], hold her hands folded [in homage] and behave respectfully towards” the junior *bhikkhu*. Once a *bhikkhu* is *avandiyo*, however, I take it that none of these actions will be required from a *bhikkhunī*. Kabil Singh (*Comparative* 167) comments: “a *bhikkhunī* is supposed to pay respect to *bhikkhus* provided they make themselves respectable.”

¹⁰⁷ Cf., e.g., Vin II 263,19, Vin III 209,1, and Vin IV 56,3. These passages describe the complaints in terms of *ujjhāyanti khīyanti* (B^c: *khiyyanti*) *vipācenti*, the *bhikkhunīs* “took offence, complained about it, and found fault with it.” The regulation of the eighth *garudhamma* at Vin II 255,23 reads *ovaṭo . . . vacanaṭṭhāto*, literally: “the path of speaking is obstructed,” which I take to have the sense “not being permitted to criticize.” The terminology is thus different and it also seems to me that the *garudhamma* is about directly criticizing or admonishing a *bhikkhu* face to face whereas the instances described in the passages quoted above give more the impression that the *bhikkhunīs* make it known in

such misbehavior by *bhikkhus*, without any censure of the *bhikkhunīs*' criticism. Elsewhere the *Vinaya* states that a *bhikkhunī* who reproves a *bhikkhu* incurs a *dukkaṭa*.¹⁰⁸ This makes it fairly safe to conclude that when a *bhikkhunī* criticizes a *bhikkhu*—the *garudhamma* prohibits criticism in general, not only unjustified criticism—this should also not be considered a grave offence of the *saṅghādisesa* type.

In the case of the fifth principle (*garudhamma* 5), which concerns the observation of penance (*mānatta*), I suppose that the main issue would be that a *bhikkhunī* who is observing penance should notify the *bhikkhus* of her situation.¹⁰⁹ In principle, failure to notify prolongs the period of penance (*mānatta*) that needs to be observed before being able to request rehabilitation (*abbhāna*).¹¹⁰ Again, this does not appear to be a grave offence in itself.

The same is unmistakably clear for the remainder of the eight principles, as these recur as case rules elsewhere in the *Vinaya*,¹¹¹ where they are all found in the *pācittiya* class. A *pācittiya* is an offence of a lighter class that requires disclosure to a fellow monastic and, in case possessions are involved, their formal forfeiture.

general that something improper has happened. Nevertheless, the similarity in the basic act of voicing disapproval or criticism seems sufficient to conclude that a breach of this *garudhamma* would not have been considered a *saṅghādisesa* offence. In fact, if the issue at stake is directly confronting a *bhikkhu*, *pācittiya* 95 at Vin IV 344,¹³ would be relevant. According to this rule, a *bhikkhunī* should not ask a *bhikkhu* questions without having been given leave to do so, which I assume intends to prevent that a *bhikkhu* is asked face to face intricate questions which he might be unable to answer.

¹⁰⁸ Vin II 276,16: *codentiyā āpatti dukkaṭassa*.

¹⁰⁹ In addition, of course, to the duties she has to fulfill towards the *bhikkhunīs*.

¹¹⁰ Vin II 36,22.

¹¹¹ A survey of such parallelism can be found in Hüsken ("Legend" 50-57) and Sujato (64-73).

Thus, the second principle to be respected (*garudhamma* 2), according to which a *bhikkhunī* should not spend the rainy season retreat in a place where there is no *bhikkhu*, is identical to *pācittiya* 56 for *bhikkhunīs*.¹¹²

The third principle (*garudhamma* 3) stipulates that a *bhikkhunī* should inquire every fortnight about the date of the observance day (*uposatha*) from the community of *bhikkhus* and come for exhortation (*ovāda*), which corresponds to *pācittiya* 59.¹¹³

According to the fourth principle (*garudhamma* 4), a *bhikkhunī* should carry out the invitation (*pavāraṇā*) for any of her shortcomings to be pointed out in both communities, which has its counterpart in *pācittiya* 57.¹¹⁴

The sixth principle concerns ordination by both communities, to which I will return soon. According to the seventh principle to be respected (*garudhamma* 7), a *bhikkhunī* should not revile or abuse a *bhikkhu*, which corresponds to *pācittiya* 52.¹¹⁵

In sum, the principles to be respected do not belong to the category of grave offences, even though for both the same term *garudhamma* is used.

The *Vinaya* reports that the promulgation of the *pācittiya* rules just surveyed takes place in reply to some event that involves *bhikkhunīs*. Adopting the viewpoint of the *Vinaya*, these events are to be understood as something that happened after the promulgation of the *garudhammas*, which marks the coming into existence of *bhikkhunīs*. Notably, each of

¹¹² Vin II 255,9 and Vin IV 313,13.

¹¹³ Vin II 255,11 and Vin IV 315,23.

¹¹⁴ Vin II 255,14 and Vin IV 314,9.

¹¹⁵ Vin II 255,21 and Vin IV 309,7.

the *pācittiya* rules that parallel a *garudhamma* makes the standard remark that is common for *Vinaya* rules, according to which the first perpetrator (*ādikkammika*) is not guilty, *anāpatti*. In other words, the first to transgress against the *pācittiya* rules corresponding to *garudhammas* 2, 3, 4 and 7 does not incur an offence. Only after the corresponding *pācittiya* rule has come into existence are transgressors considered as guilty.

This in turn gives the impression that, from the viewpoint of the canonical *Vinaya*,¹¹⁶ the eight *garudhammas* are not rules in themselves. Otherwise it would be impossible to transgress them, once they have been promulgated, and still to go free of punishment. In fact, the eight *garudhammas* do not make any stipulation about the punishment appropriate to one who violates them. Nor are the *garudhammas* formally part of the *bhikkhunī pātimokkha*, unlike the *pācittiyas*.

The eight *garudhammas* also differ from all other rules in the *Vinaya* in that they are not laid down in response to something that has happened. Instead, they are pronounced in advance. Moreover, they are pronounced for someone who at the time of their promulgation has not yet been formally ordained, as only after having been told about these *garudhammas* and having accepted them does Mahāpajāpatī become a *bhikkhunī*.¹¹⁷

In sum, the eight principles to be respected are not rules *per se*; instead, they are recommendations.¹¹⁸ As the formula describing each of

¹¹⁶ From an academic viewpoint one would rather conclude that the *garudhammas* are later than the corresponding *pācittiyas*. However, as I mentioned at the outset, my discussion needs to take the *Vinaya* account at its face value.

¹¹⁷ Kusumā (“Inaccuracies” 8).

¹¹⁸ Kawanami (“bhikkhunī” 237) quotes a Burmese *bhikkhu* to the effect that the eight “*garudhamma* rules were only ‘instructions’ given by the Buddha . . . representative of monastic protocol observed at the time of the Buddha to safeguard harmonious relationships in the community.”

these eight indicates, they are something to be respected; hence, their name *garudhamma*, “principle to be respected.”

With this basic assessment of the nature of the *garudhammas* in mind, it is now time to turn to the sixth of these. This principle to be respected (*garudhamma* 6) stipulates that a woman wishing to receive *bhikkhunī* ordination must have first undergone a two year training period as a *sikkhamānā*, after which she should request higher ordination from both communities, that is, from the *bhikkhus* and the *bhikkhunīs*: “A probationer (*sikkhamānā*) who has trained for two years in six principles should seek for higher ordination from both communities.”¹¹⁹

The need for a two-year training period as a *sikkhamānā* has a counterpart in *pācittiya* 63.¹²⁰ Notably, as shown by Bodhi (45), a *bhikkhunī* ordination does not become invalid if the female candidate has not received or not completed the training as a *sikkhamānā*.¹²¹ Thus, failing to

¹¹⁹ Vin II 255,19: *dve vassāni chasu dhammesu sikkhitasikkhāya sikkhamānāya ubhato saṅghe upasampadā pariyesitabbā.*

¹²⁰ Vin IV 319,33. Adopting an academic viewpoint, this requirement would point to the lateness of the sixth *garudhamma*, because the procedure referred to here still had to come into existence. However, my discussion needs to take the *Vinaya* account at its face value, since the description of events in the Pāli *Vinaya* forms the basis for legal decisions in the Theravāda traditions.

¹²¹ After indicating that giving full ordination to a female candidate who has not trained for two years as a *sikkhamānā* results in a *pācittiya* offence for the ordaining *bhikkhunīs*, the *Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga* continues by discussing three possible cases when this could happen while the ordination itself is legal, Vin IV 320,5. These discussions clearly imply that the ordination itself is not invalidated by the fact that the candidate has not fulfilled the *sikkhamānā* training. Bodhi (48) also points out that the precepts required for the preliminary training to be fulfilled as a *sikkhamānā* could also be administered by a *bhikkhu*, which suggests itself from Vin I 147,13, according to which a *bhikkhu* is permitted to leave his rains residence for up to seven days in order to administer the training (i.e. the *sikkhamānā* precepts) to a *sāmaṇerī*. Regarding the preceding step of going forth, Bodhi (49) notes that “there is no stipulation in the *Vinaya* explicitly prohibiting a *bhikkhu* from giving *pabbajjā* to a woman”; cf. also above note 25. However, according

fulfill this requirement does not invalidate the higher ordination. Since the *sikkhamānā* training is part of the sixth principle to be respected, it follows, as pointed out by Bodhi (47), “that the *Vinaya* did not regard as invalid an *upasampadā* ordination that failed to fully conform to the procedures laid down in the eight *garudhammas*.”

Now a rather significant fact about these *garudhammas*—so obvious that it is easily overlooked—is that they are concerned with the behavior that should be adopted by *sikkhamānās* and *bhikkhunīs*. The *garudhammas* are not recommendations or rules given to *bhikkhus*. Regarding higher ordination, the sixth *garudhamma* is meant to prevent the *bhikkhunīs* from giving higher ordination on their own, or *sikkhamānās* from taking ordination from *bhikkhunīs*, without any involvement of the *bhikkhus*.

The *Cullavagga* continues by reporting that the *bhikkhunīs* did not know how to recite the *pātimokkha*, how to confess a transgression, etc.¹²² This suggests that the rationale behind the sixth *garudhamma* could have been to ensure that the newly founded *bhikkhunī* order carries out higher ordination in accordance with the ways established by the *bhikkhu* community. In such a setting, it would only be natural to make sure that *bhikkhunīs* do not conduct higher ordinations without the involvement of *bhikkhus*.

However, the same *garudhamma* is not a rule or a recommendation regarding the way *bhikkhus* should behave. Needless to say, the *Vinaya* knows quite a number of rules that apply to *bhikkhunīs*, but which do not apply to *bhikkhus*. Thus, the *Bhikkhunīvibhaṅga* lists several rules to be followed by *bhikkhunīs* only; and the *Cullavagga* reports the Buddha

to Sp V 967,²² a woman can only receive *pabbajjā* from a *bhikkhunī*. For a discussion of the situation in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* cf. Clarke (“Creating” 229).

¹²² Vin II 259,28+34.

advising Mahāpajāpatī on the appropriate behavior to be adopted by the *bhikkhunīs* regarding two types of rules: those they share in common with the *bhikkhus* and those that apply only to *bhikkhunīs*.¹²³

After the promulgation of the sixth *garudhamma*, the *Cullavagga* continues by reporting that Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī approached the Buddha with the question: “Venerable sir, how should I proceed in relation to those Sākyan women?”¹²⁴

Following the *Cullavagga* account, this would mean that, since with the sixth *garudhamma* the Buddha had expressed his wish for dual ordination, Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī now asked about the proper procedure in this respect. As a single *bhikkhunī*, she was not able to form the quorum required for conducting the higher ordination of her followers in a dual ordination; hence she was asking the Buddha for guidance. In this situation, according to the *Vinaya* account the Buddha explicitly prescribed that the *bhikkhus* can ordain *bhikkhunīs*: “*Bhikkhus*, I prescribe the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*.”¹²⁵

This, unlike the sixth *garudhamma*, is a regulation that is meant for *bhikkhus*, and it is the first such regulation for *bhikkhus* in regard to the issue of ordaining *bhikkhunīs*.

It is noteworthy that the *Vinaya* account does not continue with the Buddha himself ordaining the female followers of Mahāpajāpatī. A simple permission by the Buddha for the whole group to go forth in his dispensation would have made the situation clear: when no *bhikkhunī* order is in existence, only a Buddha can ordain *bhikkhunīs*.

¹²³ Vin II 258,17.

¹²⁴ Vin II 256,37: *kathāhaṃ, bhante, imāsu sākiyaṇīsu* (B^e, C^e and S^e: *sākiyaṇīsu*) *paṭipajjāmi ti?*

¹²⁵ Vin II 257,7: *anujānāmi, bhikkhave, bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetun ti.*

While this is the prevalent interpretation nowadays, it is not what according to the *Vinaya* account took place. When approached by Mahāpajāpatī and asked how she should proceed in relation to her followers, the Buddha is clearly on record for turning to the *bhikkhus* and prescribing that they perform *bhikkhunī* ordination.

I would like to stress again that, on following the order of events in the way these have been recorded in the canonical *Vinaya* account of the Theravāda tradition, this first prescription given to *bhikkhus* on the matter of *bhikkhunī* ordination in terms of “I prescribe the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*” was given *after* the promulgation of the sixth *garudhamma* and therewith *after* the Buddha had expressed his preference for a dual ordination for *bhikkhunīs*. This makes it clear that, even though dual ordination is preferable, if this is not possible because a *bhikkhunī* community able to carry out the legal act of conferring higher ordination is not in existence, single ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus* is the proper way to proceed.

This original prescription to ordain *bhikkhunīs* was thus given precisely in the same situation as in modern days: a group of female candidates wished to receive higher ordination, but no *bhikkhunī* community able to carry out the ordination was in existence (adopting for the time being the traditionalists’ assumption that the Dharmaguptaka *bhikkhunīs* are not capable of providing a valid ordination by Theravāda standards).

The Buddha’s first prescription that *bhikkhus* can ordain *bhikkhunīs* is followed by a second explicit statement to the same effect, made by the newly ordained *bhikkhunīs* themselves: “The Blessed One has laid down that *bhikkhunīs* should be ordained by *bhikkhus*.”¹²⁶ This, in a way, highlights a theme that runs like a red thread through these stages of evolution in the ordination of *bhikkhunīs*, as portrayed in the *Vina-*

¹²⁶ Vin II 257,10: *bhagavatā paññattam: bhikkhūhi bhikkhuniyo upasampādetabbā ti.*

ya: the need for the involvement of *bhikkhus*.¹²⁷ This is the central point of the sixth *garudhamma* and of the subsequent regulations. It is the *bhikkhus* who can confer higher ordination to female candidates, either in cooperation with a *bhikkhunī* order, if such is in existence, or else on their own. The cooperation of the *bhikkhus* is throughout seen as indispensable for ordaining *bhikkhunīs*. The same is clearly not the case for the cooperation of a *bhikkhunī* order, which is not seen throughout as an indispensable requirement.

When the problem of interviewing female candidates arises, the Buddha gives another prescription that the *bhikkhus* can carry out *bhikkhunī* ordination even if the candidate has not cleared herself—by undergoing the formal interrogation—in front of the *bhikkhus*, but rather has done so already in the community of *bhikkhunīs* and has been higher ordained on one side: “*Bhikkhus*, I prescribe the higher ordination in the community of *bhikkhus* for one who has been higher ordained on one side and has cleared herself in the community of *bhikkhunīs*.”¹²⁸

As the context indicates, the situation that led to this pronouncement was that female candidates felt ashamed on being formally interrogated by *bhikkhus*. This part of the task of ordination—the interrogation of the candidate—is now being passed on to the *bhikkhunīs* and thus naturally a ruling is required for *bhikkhus* to carry out the ordination of *bhikkhunīs* without this interrogation.¹²⁹ This is why the regula-

¹²⁷ The importance accorded to the willingness of *bhikkhus* to confer higher ordination on *bhikkhunīs* suggests itself also from Vin I 146,8, according to which a *bhikkhu* is permitted to leave his rains residence for up to seven days in order to participate in the higher ordination of a *bhikkhunī*.

¹²⁸ Vin II 271,34: *anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ekato-upasampannāya bhikkhunīsāṅghe visuddhāya bhikkhusāṅghe upasampadan ti* (B^o: *bhikkhunīsāṅghe, S^o: upasampādetun ti*).

¹²⁹ Findly (138f) comments that in this way “the monks’ order accepts the nuns order’s testing of the appropriateness and preparedness of the candidate, meaning that the monks’ involvement is really only to give a formal stamp of approval.”

tion refers to a candidate who has “cleared herself in the community of *bhikkhunīs*.”

It is instructive to compare the wording of this prescription to the ruling in the case of higher ordination for *bhikkhus*. According to the *Vinaya* account, the higher ordination of *bhikkhus* developed from ordaining *bhikkhus* simply by giving the three refuges to ordaining them through a transaction with one motion and three proclamations. Since from the time of the transaction with one motion and three proclamations the mere giving of the three refuges is no longer a valid form of higher ordination, but rather serves as part of the going forth only, the Buddha is on record for having explicitly stated that the earlier form is now being abolished:

Bhikkhus, from this day forth I abolish the higher ordination by taking the three refuges that I had prescribed; *bhikkhus*, I prescribe the giving of the higher ordination by a transaction with one motion and three proclamations.¹³⁰

The regulation “I prescribe the higher ordination in the community of *bhikkhus* for one who has been higher ordained on one side and

¹³⁰ Vin I 56,6: *yā sā, bhikkhave, mayā tihi saraṇagamanehi upasampadā anuññātā, tāhaṃ* (B^o: *taṃ*) *ajjatagge paṭikkhipāmi; anujānāmi, bhikkhave, ñatticatutthena kammaṃ upasampādetuṃ* (C^o and S^o: *upasampadaṃ*). This example has already been pointed out by Sujato (146), who notes that a similar pattern can be found with several rules in the *Cullavagga* that address matters related to *bhikkhunīs*. The *Cullavagga* reports that at first the Buddha prescribed that the recitation of the *bhikkhunī* code of rules (*pāṭimokkha*), the confession of offences (*āpatti*) done by *bhikkhunīs*, and the carrying out of formal acts (*kamma*) for *bhikkhunīs* should be done by *bhikkhus*. Later on, when this task was passed over to the *bhikkhunīs*, the Buddha is on record for explicitly indicating that *bhikkhus* should no longer undertake these matters and that they would incur a *dukkata* offence if they were to continue undertaking them on behalf of the *bhikkhunīs*; cf. Vin II 259,25, Vin II 260,11, and Vin II 260,30.

has cleared herself in the community of *bhikkhunīs*,” however, is not preceded by any explicit indication that the earlier prescription that *bhikkhus* can ordain *bhikkhunīs* is being abolished.¹³¹

As the narrative context indicates, this second prescription was given at a time when the *bhikkhunī* order was already in existence. The second prescription thus refers to a fundamentally different situation; it regulates the proper procedure that the *bhikkhus* should follow when a *bhikkhunī* order exists. In such a situation, they are to confer the higher ordination without themselves interrogating the female candidate, as long as she has already been interrogated and ordained by the *bhikkhunīs*.

The first prescription, in contrast, regulates the proper procedure in a situation where no *bhikkhunī* order able to confer higher ordination is in existence. The two prescriptions thus do not stand in conflict with each other, as they refer to different situations.¹³² They are both

¹³¹ Dhammananda (“A Need” 155) points out that the belief that the *bhikkhunī* lineage cannot be revived “disregards the allowance of the Buddha . . . in the *Cullavagga* of the Vinaya Piṭaka that monks can give ordination to women. It is true that later the Buddha also allowed dual ordination . . . but the previous allowance for a single saṅgha was never lifted.”

¹³² With all due respect, it seems to me that Phra Payutto (60) overlooks this aspect of the situation in his discussion, when he raises the question “does this mean that both procedures are valid?” to which he then replies, “if one interprets that the first procedure wasn't repealed . . . it is thus possible to choose between the two procedures,” which he rightly points out would be problematic. Following the canonical *Vinaya* closely, however, it becomes clear that the ordination by *bhikkhus* alone is only possible when a community of *bhikkhunīs* is not in existence. As soon as such a community has come into existence this is no longer possible, as then the second regulation applies. Another problem raised by Phra Payutto (58) is, “in the formal explanation (*vibhaṅga*) of the *bhikkhunī* training rules laid down by the Buddha there is this definition: ‘The term “*bhikkhunī*” refers to a woman who has been ordained by both sanghas.’ This poses a problem in that, if *bhikkhunīs* are ordained without a *bhikkhunī* sangha present, none of these training rules will formally apply to them or be legally binding.” On this

valid and together they legislate for the two possible situations that could arise for *bhikkhus* in the matter of *bhikkhunī* ordination:

- the possibility that they have to carry out such ordination on their own, as no *bhikkhunī* community able to cooperate with them is in existence;
- the possibility that they are able to carry out such ordination in cooperation with an existing *bhikkhunī* community, who will take care of the task of interrogating the candidate.

Thus, as far as the canonical *Vinaya* is concerned, it seems clear that *bhikkhus* are permitted to ordain *bhikkhunīs* in a situation that resembles the situation when the first prescription was given—“I prescribe the giving of the higher ordination of *bhikkhunīs* by *bhikkhus*”—that is, when no *bhikkhunī* order able to confer higher ordination is in existence.¹³³

From this it would follow that the higher ordination carried out at Bodhgayā fulfills the legal requirements of the Theravāda *Vinaya*. The female candidates have followed the stipulations made in the sixth *garudharma*, in as much as they did indeed “seek for higher ordination from both communities.”¹³⁴ If their ordination, done with the assistance of the

interpretation, none of the rules would have been legally binding on the five hundred followers of Mahāpajāpatī and Mahāpajāpatī herself, which is clearly not the case.

¹³³ That higher ordination given by *bhikkhus* only would be valid is also the conclusion arrived at by the ancient Indian *Vinaya* master Guṇavarman, T 2059 at T L 341b2, translated in Shih (*Biographies*, 132), cf. also Heirman (“Buddhist” 621f note 62) and Huimin, and by the Burmese Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw, the teacher of Mahāsi Sayādaw, cf. Bodhi (57-66). As pointed out by Bodhi (32), “the procedures for *bhikkhunī* ordination laid down in the *Vinaya Piṭaka* were never intended to preclude the possibility of reviving a defunct *Bhikkhunī Sangha*.”

¹³⁴ Having been *dasasil mātās* for many years, these female candidates had gone through a preliminary training that covers the six rules incumbent on a *sikkhamānā*. The fact

Chinese *bhikkhunīs*, is considered unacceptable—for any of the various reasons I discussed earlier—then this implies that at present there is no *bhikkhunī* order in existence that can give ordination to female followers of the Theravāda traditions. In this case, the subsequent ordination of these female candidates carried out by Theravāda *bhikkhus* only is legally valid, based on the precedent that according to the canonical *Vinaya* account was set by the Buddha himself by delegating the ordination of the followers of Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī to the *bhikkhus*.

The combination of higher ordinations adopted for the 1998 Bodhgayā procedure thus cannot be faulted. The order of *bhikkhunīs* has been revived in Sri Lanka. It stands on firm legal foundations and has a right to claim recognition as a Theravāda order of *bhikkhunīs*.

Actual Decline

To complete my study, in the final part of this paper I summarize information gathered by other scholars on the current situation of Theravāda nuns that stands at the background to the revival of *bhikkhunī* ordination.

Until recently, the only avenue for Sri Lankan women to become a nun was as a *dasasil mātā*. The *dasasil mātā* movement goes back to the beginnings of the 20th century when a Sri Lankan nun took the precepts in the Burmese *thila shin* tradition and brought this tradition to Sri Lanka.

The dress of the *dasasil mātās* developed into its present form of wearing ochre robes that are alike to monastic robes in color, but on

that they have not formally become *sikkhamānās* does not invalidate their higher ordination; cf. above note 121.

closer inspection differ in as much as they are not made out of the patchwork style cloth worn by male novices and *bhikkhus*. The way *dasasil mātās* usually take the ten precepts differs from the way these are taken by laity, but also from the way these are taken by male novices.¹³⁵ This reflects the fact that these nuns are seen as standing somewhere in between the laity and monastics.¹³⁶

The Burmese *thila shins* from which the *dasasil mātā* tradition originated similarly stand in an ambivalent position between the lay and the monastic world.¹³⁷ They usually wear robes of a pinkish color that even at a long distance distinguishes them clearly from *bhikkhus* and *sāmañeras*, and they usually do not officiate at public ceremonies or preach in public.¹³⁸ The *thila shins* only go begging on specific days and

¹³⁵ Kusumā (*Dasasil* 142f); on the taking of the precepts by *dasasil mātās* cf. also Salgado (“Religious” 937-943).

¹³⁶ Salgado (“Sickness” 216) comments, “despite their renunciation of lay life, on becoming nuns they do not abandon their role as nurturers as they become *dasa sil mātās* (ten-precept-mothers) and continue to be preparers of food”; on *dasasil mātās* and the ownership of monastic lands cf. also Salgado (“Teaching”). Kusumā (*Dasasil* xxi) explains that “due to their unordained condition, the *Dasasil Mātās* are seen as a marginalized group in Sri Lanka today. They do not belong to the Ordained *Bhikkhunī*, *Sāmanerī* or *Sikkhamānā* that the Buddha instituted. Neither do they belong to the lay community . . . they are torn between cultural norms of two divergent groups with the result that a suitable environment necessary to sustain the life and development of a female Buddhist recluse is not obtained.”

¹³⁷ Kawanami (“Religious” 31) notes, “in general, monks address a *thilā-shin* as *tagamā* (female donor), just as they would any other laywoman,” and (21) “the daily life of [a] *thilā-shin* is centered around merit-making activities that involve menial services to the religious community of the monks.” In general (34), “as for religious words and honorific verbs for eating, there is an interesting mixture of religious and lay connotations for the nuns.”

¹³⁸ Kawanami (“Patterns” 166f) notes, “certain religious roles and functions have traditionally been closed to women. Officiating at a public ceremony is one of them . . . preaching is another area of religious importance that is exclusively monopolized by

receive as food uncooked rice, whereas Burmese *bhikkhus* can go begging any day and will receive cooked rice and readily prepared dishes.¹³⁹

According to Kawanami (“Religious” 25 and 27), “only a few *thilá-shin* in Burma are able to follow all ten precepts [which requires abstaining from the use of money]. To become a ten-precept *thilá-shin*, a woman has to have either a wealthy family background or a highly successful academic career . . . it may sound paradoxical, but to be in a position of detachment, she must have sufficient resources and backing to be able to afford it.” As a result of this predicament, “a nun may save up her whole donation income for the rest of the year to be able to abide by the ten precepts during the three months of *Vassa*.”

In sum, compared to the *dasasil mātās* the *thila shins* appear to be in a less fortunate position. The situation of the *mae chis* in Thailand seems to be still worse,¹⁴⁰ even though they look back on a long history, apparently already being in existence in the early seventeenth century.¹⁴¹

Because the *mae chis* wear only white robes,¹⁴² their appearance is visually similar to the laity except for the fact that they have a shaven

monks in contemporary Myanmar . . . Burmese nuns do preach and teach people about Buddhist ideas and philosophy, but mostly in informal and private settings.”

¹³⁹ Carbonnel (269) adds that “the small amount of offerings nuns receive . . . obliges them to increase the number of donors . . . in comparison, donations from four to five households are enough for monks to insure a sufficient daily intake.”

¹⁴⁰ Barnes (“Buddhist” 268) notes that the “*mae ji* are a group with serious problems. However ambiguous the position of Sri Lanka’s *dasa sil matavo*, they are . . . very different from the *mae ji*.”

¹⁴¹ Skilling (“Female”); on the situation in Cambodia cf. Jacobsen.

¹⁴² Lekshe Tsomo (14) points out that the *mae chis* “wear the white robes of a layperson, receive little support, and enjoy little prestige.” Ito (“Ordained” 168) explains that “many Thai people associate the yellow robes only with male Buddhist monks and novices, not with females. Thai people find it difficult to imagine a woman taking the same

head.¹⁴³ A *mae chi* usually takes only eight precepts at her ordination, which is considered a secular event,¹⁴⁴ and after ordination she often continues using her lay name.¹⁴⁵ Unlike *bhikkhus*, *mae chis* do not necessarily receive free medical treatment;¹⁴⁶ in fact, even at temples they are sometimes expected to work for the food and shelter they receive.¹⁴⁷

yellow robes and duties as a monk”; on how women are perceived in Thai rural society, which seems to make it indeed difficult imagining them in robes, cf. also Keyes. Barnes (“Buddhist” 268) notes that “because *mae ji* are not ordained they have no religious states and . . . many monks consider them a nuisance.”

¹⁴³ According to Jordt (“Bhikkhuni” 35), a feature “of *mae-chii* that the Sangha and the society at large stress is the categorization of these women as members of the laity.”

¹⁴⁴ Falk (“Women” 37) notes that “Thai nuns generally follow eight precepts,” to which Falk (“Women” 48 and 50) adds that the “the ordination of *mae chis* . . . is conceived to be a secular event,” it “is regarded as a lay ordination.” Cook (149) depicts the situation of *mae chis* in between the lay and the monastic world in the following way: “when donating alms themselves *mae chee* are more closely associated with the laity . . . because, like the laity, they donate alms to the sangha.” However, when “receiving alms from the laity individually and on behalf of the monastic community as a whole, *mae chee* are necessarily associated with the sangha.”

¹⁴⁵ Falk (*Making* 12) reports that, “in contrast to monks, the *mae chiis* keep their lay names after ordination, which is a sign of the Thai *mae chiis*’ ambiguous standing.”

¹⁴⁶ Brown (26) points out that “unlike monks, *maēchī* do not unquestionably receive medical treatment for free or discounted rates.” Seeger (“Changing” 813) notes that because of wearing white robes instead of monastic colored robes, *mae chis* are expected to handle money. Thus, according to one report, “for women who want to practise the ten precepts . . . this can be problematic . . . lay people might suspect that *maechis* ‘only’ pretend to have no money.”

¹⁴⁷ Ito (“New” 120) reports that “abbots and the laypeople who support the temple often insist that a *mae chii* contribute to the temple, because she lives for free in the temple and eats the food that the community of laypeople intended for monks . . . thus, a *mae chii* in a temple is almost always expected to help cook for monks and novices.”

Nunneries housing *mae chis* usually lack important sacred structures typical of a temple.¹⁴⁸ While the government denies them the benefits of free travel, etc., accorded to *bhikkhus*, they are also denied the right to vote, in line with the custom that monastics do not vote.¹⁴⁹

According to Falk (*Making* 40), “the Thai *mae chiis*’ marginal position in the temples and society is striking, although they have a long history in Thailand and have lived at the temples for centuries.” Falk (*Making* 249) sums up that “the *mae chiis*’ long history in Thailand has not granted them formal religious legitimacy. Their secondary standing in the religious field is further confirmed by their lack of support from the Thai government and the Thai *sangha*. The *mae chiis*’ ambiguous situation in society can be explained by their lack of legal recognition as ordained persons and this has placed the *mae chiis* in a sort of official limbo.”

When evaluating the situation of *mae chis*, it also needs to be noted that their situation in Thailand has improved in recent times and through spiritual accomplishment or learning an individual *mae chi* can

¹⁴⁸ Falk (*Making* 103f) notes that nunneries “lack some of the significant and sacred structures that are present at temples” for *bhikkhus*. A nunnery’s “standing as a monastic place cannot therefore rely on its buildings, but is dependent on the order maintained and on the *mae chiis*’ daily activities . . . [it] could easily turn into a lay place if religious practices are not upheld.” In contrast, according to Nissan (33) Sri Lankan nunneries are “indistinguishable from any town temple. The only difference is that they are inhabited by female rather than male renouncers.”

¹⁴⁹ Falk (*Making* 37) reports, “the authorities, too, treat the *mae chiis* in ambiguous ways. The government supports the monks with free education, free medical care and free or reduced fares for buses and trains. *Mae chiis* do not receive such support from the government on account of their official status as laity. However, their ambiguous position becomes obvious when the same government denies the *mae chiis* the right to vote in public elections on the basis of their renunciation of worldly matters”; cf. also Kabilsingh (*Thai* 38) and Seeger (“Changing” 809).

nowadays rise to a position of considerable eminence.¹⁵⁰ The actual situation is thus complex, and it also needs to be kept in mind that *mae chis* do not necessarily perceive themselves to be in a situation of discrimination.¹⁵¹

Nevertheless, this brief sketch shows that the current situation of nuns in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand compares poorly to the situation of *bhikkhunīs* described in the Pāli canon.¹⁵² In the final analysis the disadvantages nuns in these countries have to face seem to go back to the basic fact that these nuns in Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand are not recognized as fully ordained monastics on a par with the *bhikkhus*. This is particularly evident with the *mae chis* in Thailand who, in spite of being

¹⁵⁰ Cf., e.g., Collins and McDaniel, Scott, Seeger (“Against”), and Seeger (“Reversal”). Nevertheless, even in the case of outstanding *mae chis* the fact that they are not fully ordained has its impact: Seeger (“Reversal” 18f) reports that to accord *arahant* status to a highly accomplished *mae chi* can be problematic, because of “the Thai belief that the status of someone not properly ordained would be ‘too weak’” to continue living as an *arahant*. Such “beliefs seem to show that the possibility of becoming ordained as a *mae chi* is not necessarily regarded as an equivalent or satisfactory alternative to the *bhikkhunī* order”; cf., however, also Seeger (“Against” 575). The canonical position in the Theravāda tradition in this respect is that a lay person can become an *arahant*, but will necessarily go forth (unless impending death prevents him or her from doing so), as the degree of inner detachment reached will no longer make it possible to live the household life; cf. Anālayo (“Structural” 61f note 2). In the words of Wijayaratana (172), “did they not necessarily become renouncers in the very moment they became Arahants? If so, they had no reason to stay at home.” From a canonical viewpoint, the issue at stake thus appears to be the basic act of going forth from the home life, not necessarily the taking of higher ordination.

¹⁵¹ Cf., e.g., Cook (151).

¹⁵² A telling example is the report in Esterik (40) that two outstanding female lay meditation teachers in Thailand had no “husbands or families. They eschewed the normal roles of Thai women. They lived like the women in white, *mæchi*, although they rejected this role because the generally low status of the *mæchi* would have limited their ability to lead lay groups.” Cf. also, e.g., Barnes (“Women” 139f) and Mrozik (364).

the nun tradition with the longest history, are in a worse position in several respects compared to their Burmese and Sri Lankan counterparts.

However virtuous or learned some of these nuns may be, just like a lamp placed behind a screen no longer illuminates the room, so too they are not able to illuminate the *sāsana* in the way the *bhikkhunīs* of ancient times are said to have done. Therefore, there can be little doubt that the situation for women who aspire to live the monastic life in these countries has gone through an actual decline.¹⁵³

The present situation for *bhikkhunīs* in Sri Lanka appears to show clear improvements in comparison. According to de Silva (134), “now, with the restoration of the *Bhikkhunī* Saṅgha, the nuns [*bhikkhunīs*] are becoming accepted on an equal footing with monks and are being invited to perform almost all the rituals that were previously performed only by monks . . . in most villages, the *bhikkhus* have also begun to appreciate the services of the *bhikkhunīs* and often invite them to the temple on full moon days to give Dhamma talks and to lead meditations.”¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the option of taking higher ordination as a *bhikkhunī* is not necessarily an attractive one for the *dasasil mātās*, *thila shins* and *mae chis*.¹⁵⁵ While some are keen on improving their situation in this

¹⁵³ Brown (24) sums up the situation in Thailand: “Thai women seeking to focus their lives on religion are in an entirely different situation than Thai men seeking to do the same.” According to Bodhi (23), “the plain fact is that these subordinate renunciant roles do not meet their aspirations or give them access to the complete training laid down by the Buddha. Nor did the Buddha ever design for women renunciants such subordinate roles as that of the *dasasilmātā*, the *thilashin*, or the *maechee* . . . we should give renunciant women the role he intended for them.”

¹⁵⁴ Cf. also Goonatilake (46f); and on the potential of *bhikkhunī* revival for Thailand cf. Tomalin (389).

¹⁵⁵ Nissan (45) points out that the pursuit of higher ordination is “a quest which if given priority and emphasis would call into question the legitimacy of their unordained prac-

way, a substantial number prefer to remain in their present setting. One problem is that their whole social relationship network with other nuns is based on the principle of seniority, which on taking *bhikkhunī* ordination will have to be restructured according to seniority in higher ordination.

Another and probably considerably more weighty matter is the apprehension that, whatever form of harmonious co-existence they have negotiated for themselves vis-à-vis the *bhikkhus*, this will have to be re-negotiated. In fact, in case the *bhikkhus* are opposed to *bhikkhunī* ordination, it may collapse entirely.¹⁵⁶ Needless to say, *bhikkhus* who object to *bhikkhunī* ordination may in turn influence lay supporters. In short, such a weighty step could adversely affect the main pillars of the present life situation of these nuns. Moreover, being *bhikkhunīs* they would become more dependent on *bhikkhus*, something that may not necessarily be always desirable.

In addition to these practical problems there also lurks the ever present fear of the decline of the *sāsana*. Bloss (19) reports that the *dasasil mātās* who are opposed to *bhikkhunī* ordination reason that “the close relationship between *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunīs* might bring the downfall of a *sangha* which they view as [already] in decline.”¹⁵⁷

tice.” For a discussion of the situation in the Tibetan tradition, where nuns are also not necessarily keen on higher ordination, cf., e.g., Hannah.

¹⁵⁶ Sasson (“Politics” 61) comments, “for many of the *silmātās*, challenging monastic authority carried with it the risk of losing the little bit of lay support they might have managed to procure.” Sasson (“Peeling” 80) adds, “if women are going to take on *upasampadā* without the formal blessing of their government, the monks, or the lay-people they are surrounded by . . . they may be risking their very ability to survive as monastics, for without socio-economic support, monasticism is effectively impossible.”

¹⁵⁷ Bloss (22) also reports that *bhikkhus* he interviewed about the *dasasil mātās* highlighted the Buddha’s refusal to start the order of *bhikkhunīs* and his prediction of decline.

When considered from the canonical viewpoint, however, the decline of the *sāsana* is rather to be found in the absence of an order of *bhikkhunīs*. A discourse in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and its Chinese and Tibetan parallels describe several unfortunate conditions where one might be reborn and be unable to practice the Dharma, such as being born in hell, in the animal realm, among hungry ghosts, or in a border country. The problem of being born in a border country is that there the four assemblies are not found—the *bhikkhus*, the *bhikkhunīs*, the male lay followers and the female lay followers.¹⁵⁸ While this passage speaks of the absence of all four assemblies, in view of the interrelation between the four assemblies, even the absence of one of them would result in a deplorable situation.

From this viewpoint, Burma at present would be in such a deplorable situation, lacking an assembly of *bhikkhunīs* in the country. In Thailand the prohibition of *bhikkhunī* ordination by Thai *bhikkhus* makes it difficult for Thailand to emerge from a similar condition. Only in Sri Lanka has the border country condition been fully overcome, as all four assemblies can now be found in the country, although official recognition of the *bhikkhunī* order by the Buddha *Sāsana* ministry has so far been withheld. The border country condition has also to some degree been overcome in those countries in the West where, even though Buddhists are a minority, *bhikkhunī* communities have come into being.

According to a stanza in the discourse I translated at the outset of this article, each of the four assemblies makes its contribution to illuminating the Buddhist community. Alongside various qualities each of the

¹⁵⁸ AN 8.29 at AN IV 226,8: *paccantimesu janapadesu paccājāto hoti . . . yatha n' atthi gati bhikkhūnaṃ bhikkhunīnaṃ upāsakānaṃ upāsikānaṃ* (cf. also DN 33 at DN III 264,12); MĀ 124 at T I 613b11: 生在邊國夷狄之中 . . . 若無比丘, 比丘尼, 優婆塞, 優婆夷; Pāsādika (6,15): *mtha' 'khob kyi mi . . . dge slong dang, dge slong ma dang, dge bsnyen dang, dge bsnyen ma mi 'ong ba'i nang du skyes pa yin no.*

four assemblies should possess in order to do so, a stanza found similarly in the parallel versions indicates that in the case of a *bhikkhu* an aspect of such illumination is through his possession of virtue (*sīla*). The importance of *bhikkhus* as embodiment of virtuous conduct is in fact a prominent theme in the history of the Theravāda traditions, where a decline of moral standards among the *bhikkhus* is experienced as marking the decline of Buddhism, so much so that Buddhist kings at times intervene in an attempt to revive high standards of virtue among the *bhikkhu* community. Thus, the presence of virtuous *bhikkhus* is indeed considered by members of the Theravāda traditions as “illuminating the community.”

According to the same stanza, the *bhikkhunīs* illuminate the community through being learned. In view of the traditional role model of women in ancient India as a wife and a mother, the reference to the learnedness of the *bhikkhunīs* as their contribution to the community is significant. Being learned—which in the early Buddhist setting requires combining theoretical acquaintance with practical realization—the *bhikkhunīs* are expected to make their contribution to the prosperity of the Buddha’s dispensation. Far from being what ushers in decline, from the viewpoint of this and other canonical passages discussed above, the presence of *bhikkhunīs* is required to prevent decline.

By way of concluding my examination, I translate the Pāli version of the discourse translated at the outset of this paper:¹⁵⁹

Bhikkhus, these four,¹⁶⁰ being competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, upholders of the Dharma, practition-

¹⁵⁹ AN 4.7 at AN II 8,7 to 8,24.

¹⁶⁰ While B^e, E^e and S^e just read *cattāro ’me, bhikkhave, viyattā*, C^e specifies that these four are “persons,” reading *cattāro ’me, bhikkhave, puggalā viyattā*.

ers of the Dharma who follow the Dharma, illuminate the community. What are the four?

Bhikkhus, a *bhikkhu* who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, an upholder of the Dharma, a practitioner of the Dharma who follows the Dharma, illuminates the community.

Bhikkhus, a *bhikkhunī* who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, an upholder of the Dharma, a practitioner of the Dharma who follows the Dharma, illuminates the community.

Bhikkhus, a male lay follower who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, an upholder of the Dharma, a practitioner of the Dharma who follows the Dharma, illuminates the community.

Bhikkhus, a female lay follower who is competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, an upholder of the Dharma, a practitioner of the Dharma who follows the Dharma, illuminates the community.¹⁶¹

Bhikkhus, these four, being competent, disciplined, self-confident, learned, upholders of the Dharma, practitioners of the Dharma who follow the Dharma, illuminate the community.

One who is competent and self-confident,
learned and an upholder of the Dharma,
who lives according to the Dharma,

¹⁶¹ The editions vary in the degree to which they abbreviate; I give the text in full.

such a one is reckoned an illumination of
the community.

A *bhikkhu* endowed with virtue,
a *bhikkhuni* who is learned,
a male lay follower with faith,
and a female lay follower with faith,
these illuminate the community,
these are the community's illumination.”

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^e	Burmese edition
C ^e	Ceylonese edition
D	Derge edition
DĀ	<i>Dirgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
Dīp	<i>Dīpavaṃsa</i>
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
E ^e	Pali Text Society edition
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
Kv-a	<i>Kathāvattu-aṭṭhakathā</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
Mhv	<i>Mahāvāṃsa</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Mp	<i>Manorathapūraṇī</i>
Q	Peking edition
S ^e	Siamese edition
SĀ	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	<i>Saṃyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
SHT	Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden

SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
Sp	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
Sv	<i>Sumaṅgalavilāsinī</i>
T	Taishō (CBETA)
Ud	<i>Udāna</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>

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