NUNS IN CONTEMPORARY TAIWANESE AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM

A thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Australian National University

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The work described herein is the author's own work, unless otherwise stated. None of the material has been submitted in any part or form for a degree at this or any other university.

Bhiksuni Tenzin Yeshe
To nuns and yoginis of all times, everywhere who have kept alive the flame of spirituality.
Without the involvement and support of the numerous nuns who inspired this study and are its subjects, it would not have been possible to write about their lives, religious experience and aspirations. Because of their tireless and generous contributions, another step has been taken to augment the work being done by religio-feminist researchers: the work of redressing the gender imbalance which exists in religious writings of all times.

I would like to mention the marvellous and erudite abbesses who gave of their time, energy and patience: Venerables Wu-yin and Ming-chia of Hsiang-kuang Temple, who opened their temple doors and their hearts to me and shared their temple life with me; Venerable Shig Hui-wan of Hua-fan Institute, who gently described the ch'an life and the rich bhikṣunī tradition; Venerable Chao-hui of the Vihāra of Universal Vows, who shared her deep knowledge of Bhikṣunī-Vinaya; Venerable Cheng-yen of the Abode of Still Thoughts, who by her words and actions showed me the demeanour of a bhikṣunī; Venerable Heng-ching of Taiwan National University, whose office I came to know rather well during my many visits to the campus for illuminating and detailed discussions with her; and Venerable Khandro Rinpoche of Samten Tse, India, who graciously accommodated me in her nunnery and with whom I spent many long and fruitful hours of discussion on a wide range of Buddhist philosophical and monastic topics.

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Once research materials, hundreds of pages of interviews and notes, texts, photographs and photocopies had been collected, the work of writing itself began to take shape beyond a mere assortment of drafts, and for this I wish to extend grateful thanks to my supervisor, Professor W.J.F. Jenner, Head of the China Centre, A.N.U. who, by his thorough and meticulous reading and invaluable and insightful suggestions, guided me through the task of putting together a Masters dissertation. For this and for his many preliminary suggestions regarding my research, I express my deep appreciation. In addition, I received financial support from an Australian Post-graduate Award.

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Abstract

This study explores the lives and experience of Taiwanese and Tibetan nuns in contemporary Buddhism. Focusing on a selection of nuns' communities from both traditions, the study examines temple organisation, daily life, education, monastic discipline and precept, activities and monastic obligations within nunneries of the two traditions. Drawing upon case histories and personal interviews, nuns' motivations, attitudes, aims and aspirations, and self-perceptions are portrayed. The study allows nuns in both traditions to express in their own voices why they have chosen the religious life and what it means to them.

Female monasticism represents a significant part of Taiwanese Buddhism, with an increasing number of women choosing the cenobitic religious life. In Tibetan Buddhism, however, while nuns can excel in their own personal practice, they cannot be as effective in the monastic and lay communities as their Taiwanese sisters. The study examines the dynamics of this issue.

The two nuns' traditions themselves are compared and contrasted. Taiwan's flourishing and vigorous communities of nuns are evidently playing a major part in the Buddhist revival there, while Tibetan nuns struggle to get a monastic education and even nunneries in which to study and practise. The attitudes and points of view of monks and lay Buddhists in the two societies are also explored as indicators of where the two groups of nuns fit in their societies, and to what extent they can function within their monastic hierarchies.

The study also looks at monastic precepts in terms of their being 'vows in action', and the capacity of precepts formulated 2,500 years ago to adapt and fit with changing circumstances.
The question of full ordination as a bhikṣunī is discussed. It is available to nuns in Taiwan, where it is viewed as being of great significance and usefulness, to the extent that few women choose to remain novices. Within Tibetan Buddhism, however, it has never existed as a living lineage and current attempts to introduce it meet obfuscation and even opposition from some members of the monk hierarchy. Dialogue recently begun between the two monastic traditions has led to increasing interest in full ordination being shown by Tibetan nuns as they learn of its importance in giving them equivalence in monastic life and increased opportunity in the diverse areas of religious education and monastic responsibility.

Very few academic studies in the religious field have concentrated upon Buddhist monastic women in Taiwanese or Tibetan communities. By explicating and describing women's role in the monasticism of two of Buddhism's great traditions, it is hoped to enrich understanding of the lives of Buddhist nuns in these two societies. By documenting their lives and achievements, this study joins with the efforts of others to recognise more appropriately the place of women in religion.
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Bhikṣuṇī disciples of Lung-lien Fa-shih studying at Szechwan Bhikṣuṇī Institute.

Taiwan Cheng-yen Fa-shih, Abbess of the Abode of Still Thoughts, and Founder of Compassion Relief Tz’ü Chi Foundation, both in Hualien, Taiwan.

Shig Hui Wan (Hsiao-yün Fa-shih), Abbess of the Lotus Buddhist Ashram and Sino-Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies, and Founder of Hua-fan Institute of Humanities and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan, standing beside the Buddha statue which graces the Buddha Hall of the Lotus Buddhist Ashram.

The largest ordination ceremony ever held in Taiwan. In 1990, 709 ordinees participated in a Triple Platform Ordination ceremony at Wan-fo Temple, Taichung.

Bhikṣuṇī Ordination (Taipei, Taiwan, 1982) Orderliness characterises all activities during the ordination training period, so that they become opportunities for mindfulness and care. The eating of meals is a time for internal contemplation and for harmony of action. All ordinees follow ritualised routines and gestures to pray before and after the meal, to eat the food, to request more and to handle the bowls and utensils.

New novice monks and nuns wearing the five-patched chia-sha, having received the ten novice precepts from the three principal abbots, file from the ordination hall, led by two yin-li shih-fu playing the small bell and wooden fish.

After the first platform of the Triple Platform Ordination, novice ordination, ordinees begin training for the second platform, bhikṣu ordination. They are given the nine-patched yellow ceremonial robe which they will wear at the second part of the bhikṣuṇī ordination, the Inner Platform.

After filing into the ordination hall and bowing to the Buddha, the ten ordaining abbots proceed to the platform to perform the first part of the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī ordination, the Outer Platform. At this time, the abbots, seven of whom have up until this point been absent, introduce themselves to the ordinees and are asked if they approve of the candidates put forward for ordination.
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**Hsiang-kuang Temple**
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The interior of the original Buddha Hall.

Wu-yin Fa-shih, Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple, during an interview, October 1996.

Wu-yin Fa-shih (left), Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple and Dean of the Luminary International Bhikṣuṇi Society, and Ming-chia Fa-shih, Hsiang-kuang Temple’s Priorress.

Wu-yin Fa-shih teaches a class in Buddhist philosophy at Hsiang-kuang Temple.

The head librarian and accomplished calligraphy instructor at Hsiang-kuang Temple guides a student during a calligraphy class.

Two bhikṣuṇis talk to lay disciples in Hsiang-kuang Temple’s reception room.

Senior Vinaya instructor (left) and two nuns who work in the Guest Department of Hsiang-kuang Temple.

Two bhikṣuṇis play the wooden fish and gong during morning and evening prayers.

**India. Gangen Chöling Nunnery**
The new Buddha Hall of Gangen Chöling nunnery set amidst pine and deodar trees in the hills above Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Ganden Chöling’s head nun, Venerable Tenzin Tzenlha (left) and one of my nun informants during a discussion in Gangen Chöling’s reception office.

Ganden Chöling’s nuns meet for morning prayers in the Buddha Hall. Their tea and breakfast bread is in front of them.

A Tibetan history class in Gangen Chöling’s Buddha Hall, which doubles as a classroom.
Ganden Chöling nuns make tsa-tsa images from clay. After the tsa-tsas have dried, they are often painted.

After morning prayers, Ganden Chöling nuns, still wearing their yellow ceremonial robes, queue for lunch.

**Dolma Ling Nunnery**
The Himalayan mountain range is the setting for the Tibetan nunneries in this study.

The newly-completed office and reception buildings at Dolma Ling nunnery in the Kangra Valley, below Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.

Two Dolma Ling nuns who participated in this study stand outside the new accommodation block.

Dolma Ling nuns meet in groups to debate Buddhist philosophy in the fields behind the nunnery.

Three nuns taking their turn on kitchen duty at Dolma Ling.

Nuns from Dolma Ling and other Tibetan nunneries participate in a peaceful demonstration on the occasion of the March 10 Lhasa Uprising anniversary, 1997.

**Samten Tse Nuns’ Retreat**
Khandro Rinpoche, Abbess of Samten Tse Nuns’ Retreat, near Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh.

Khandro Rinpoche watches her nuns practise making ritual offering cakes (*torma*) out of clay.

Khandro Rinpoche (rear centre) officiating at morning prayers, Samten Tse.

A Samten Tse nun blows the conch shell to call the community to prayers.

**Tashi Jong Nunnery**
A group of Tashi Jong nuns in the shrine room of their temporary nunnery at Manangi Gompa, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Ani Tsomo, head nun of Tashi Jong nunnery.

Tashi Jong nuns perform afternoon pūja.
Shugsep Nunnery
The entrance to Shugsep nunnery, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.

A group of Shugsep nuns in their room.

Bhiksuni Pema Tsultrim (left), head nun of Tilokpur Kagyu nunnery, with my friend and translator Venerable Konchok Dolma. Pema Tsultrim was ordained as a bhiksuni in Hong Kong in 1984 and was a member of the first group of Tibetan nuns to receive bhiksuni ordination in recent times.
Transliteration Guide

For the purpose of conforming to the majority of English-language materials referred to in this study which use the Wade-Giles romanisation system, Chinese words which occur in the text are also transcribed using this system. They are given in italics with the exception of personal names and of temple and place names.

The transliteration of the Tibetan language poses special problems for readers unfamiliar with Tibetan pronunciation. The written language contains consonant clusters which take the form of a series of mute or semi-mute prefixes and of super-, sub- and post-suffixes, many of which are also not pronounced. For this reason, the complete orthographic transliteration which appears where Tibetan words occur in the text is quite cumbersome. This formal transliteration is based on the Classical Tibetan transcription system of Turrell V. Wylie ("A Standard System of Tibetan Transliteration", Harvard Journal of Asian Studies 22, 1959, pp. 261-7). An example of the transliteration system is the nunnery name pronounced Thrangu Tashi Jong which, when rendered into its complete transliteration becomes Khra-'gu bKrā-shis lJong. I have generally given the simple version followed by the bracketed orthographic version the first time a word is used, and only the simple version thereafter.

Sanskrit words are transliterated complete with diacritical marks and are given in italics, apart from words commonly used in English, such as Dharma and bhikṣuṇi, and the names of various Vīhinayā schools, which are retained in plain text throughout.

Pāli words occur only in quotes or when forming part of book titles.

Abbreviations: Ch: Chinese; Skt: Sanskrit; T: Tibetan
"She is a nun because she is a beggar for alms, 
she is a nun because she submits to walking for 
alms, she is a nun because she is one who wears 
the patch-work robes, she is a nun by the designation 
of others), a nun because of her acknowledgement, 
a nun (to whom it was) said, 'Come, nun', 
a nun is one ordained by the three goings to a refuge, 
a nun is auspicious, a nun is the essential, 
a nun is a learner, a nun is an adept, 
a nun is ordained by both complete Orders by 
means of a (formal) act at which the motion is 
put and followed by three proclamations, 
irreversible and fit to stand."

- from the Pāli Bhikkhuni Vinaya

SECTION I

BUDDHIST MONASTIC WOMEN

1 REASONS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

In extant traditional religious literature from the various schools of Buddhism, there is a
dearth of information concerning female religious practitioners and nuns in comparison
with that devoted to men and monks.\(^1\) There is little instructional and textual material
directed towards women, little biography and hagiography concerning realised and saintly
women and few religio-historical records.\(^2\) Consequently, although it is far from the

\(^1\) Tessa Bartholomeusz states in *Women Under the Bo Tree* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), that the Pali *Dipavamsa* is one notable exception and that it “teems with allusions to the order of
nuns” to the extent that some Pali scholars have speculated that “it may be one of the few literary pieces
that nuns composed” (p. 18). She also states that it is “one of the most valulable resources for gaining an
insight into the lives of the ancient nuns of Sri Lanka” (p. 209), however she also notes that the Pali
*Mahāvamsa* gives scant positive mention of nuns unless in conjunction with monks.

A recent development worthy of mention is new research currently being undertaken by the Institute for
Medieval Japanese Studies of Columbia University, New York. Headed by Professor Barbara Ruch, a
team of scholars forming the Imperial Buddhist Convent Survey Project, have uncovered previously
unexamined materials concerning nuns in thirteenth century Japan and in particular the Abbess Mugai
Nyodai (1233-1298) of the Rinzai sect. The scholars state that their work is to “open up what has been
one of the most astonishingly neglected areas of research in Japanese religious and cultural history - the
vital role played by religious women and nuns in the introduction and spread of Buddhism in Japan, as
institution builders and patrons, and in the founding of major networks of convents to which present-day
Imperial Buddhist Convents trace back their roots.” “IMJS Reports”, Vol. 8, No. 1, December 1997, p. 2.
Despite these instances of religious women’s participation and creativity in Buddhist spiritual life, there
still remains an overwhelming impression of omission and of ignorance of women’s role in historical
Buddhism. It remains to be seen whether further material will be uncovered which may lead to
reclamation of the monastic balance which is known to have existed at the time of the Buddha.

\(^2\) In *Women in Buddhism* (Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1979), Diana Paul presents a range of
textual excerpts concerning the depiction of women in Mahāyāna Buddhism. From the scriptures which
portray intensely misogynistic attitudes towards women as evil temptresses who cannot hope to attain the
fruits of salvation, through texts which stipulate the necessity to change gender or achieve a male rebirth,
up to the more egalitarian view of women where the main emphasis, however, is on asexuality rather
than equality of the sexes, there is an all-pervading prejudice. Buddhist scriptures which depict women in
a positive light, or which concentrate on women’s capabilities and achievements are few. Certain eminent
examples which have been cited by Paul are the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanāda* Sūtras
which stress the doctrines of emptiness and *tathāgatagarbha* and the essential non-distinction of natures.
They use this argument as the basis of equality of the sexes. (continued on page 2)
truth, one could be forgiven for assuming Buddhism to be a religion that is almost exclusively the domain of men and monks, where the majority of women can only apply themselves to basic observances traditionally followed by the lay person, such as devotional activities of temple worship, the offering of incense, generosity to monks and the chanting of daily prayers. So it has been with some surprise that several people have said to me when I mentioned that I was undertaking this study, "Oh, there are nuns in Buddhism!" On other occasions people who know that there are ordained women in the Buddhist tradition have said, "But, where are the women teachers?" It is a grossly male-centred construction of Buddhist historiography that should elicit such comments from educated people.3

It is particularly distorted considering that Buddhism originally did contain large numbers of women monastics and that many of these women were dedicated, spiritually erudite and articulate and highly realised. Male indifference and ambivalence were the major

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3 Several feminist scholars (including Rita Gross, Anne Klein, Nancy Falk and Miranda Shaw) are undertaking the task of "feminist reconstruction" and recovering women's place in Buddhist textual and historiographical writings. It is important to heed their observations that because the "records of women's lives are preserved in disproportionately small amounts...available information about women cannot be accepted as numerically representative but rather, in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's words, 'should be read as the tip of an iceberg indicating how much historical information we have lost'...("The 'Quilting' of Women's History: Phoebe of Cenchreae", in Embodied Love, p. 40). Even when documents from the past are irredeemably androcentric, this cannot be taken as evidence that women were not present....Misogynistic sources do not necessarily reflect the reality of women's lives, but they do tell something about the environments in which women lived." Miranda Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), pp. 12-13.
factors in the almost complete disappearance of women monastics from the original Buddhist world by the ninth century.\textsuperscript{4} Furthermore, in religion generally, inveterate societal attitudes to gender have always played a major role in the side-lining of women, as Karen Jo Torjesen says in her compelling book, \textit{When Women Were Priests}:

Why, then, are we so unaware of the prominence of women in the birth of Christianity? Why does this powerful misperception continue to marginalise women in even the more enlightened branches of contemporary Christianity? The answers to these questions are complex, but they begin and end in cultural views about gender.\textsuperscript{5}

Despite entrenched cultural beliefs about gender, when Buddhism first made its appearance in India in the sixth century BCE, women were not long behind men in demanding full ordination as bhikṣuṇīs.\textsuperscript{6} Religious women in Sri Lanka followed suit in the third century BCE. Chinese Buddhist women embraced monastic life as soon as there were Chinese translations of Sanskrit Vinaya texts by which to ordain them, and the first Chinese nun known to have received the precepts of a bhikṣuṇī did so in 357 CE. The bhikṣuṇī lineage was also transmitted to Burma, Korea and Vietnam. In addition to Buddhist countries where women have enjoyed full ordination, renunciate women have lived and practised in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal and Japan and also in Tibet, where the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (T. \textit{g}Shi thams-chad yod-par smra-ba) lineage of


\textsuperscript{6} This was not without its complications or without apparent partiality towards the Monks' Order, however. Under the influence of the society in which he lived, and unwilling to flout the current social attitudes to women which had, however, already accepted the existence of Jain nuns, the Buddha finally accepted women into the monastic Order provided they agreed to certain conditions. The Eight Chief Rules (\textit{gurudharma}) rendered nuns subordinate to monks in almost all their monastic obligations. For a full account of the founding of the Bhikṣuṇī Samgha in India, I refer the reader to I.B. Horner's comprehensive and scholarly work, \textit{Women Under Primitive Buddhism} (Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979), pp. 95-117. For further discussion and explanation of the Eight Chief Rules, see Section I.5 of the present study and Appendix 1.
śramaṇerikā (novice) ordination was introduced from India in the eleventh century and continues to be transmitted.\(^7\)

However, in spite of their historically large numbers, and their continuing existence as a force to be reckoned with in countries which follow the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition (Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea and recently again in China itself), Buddhist nuns have, on the whole, had to live with the knowledge that their lives and practice are regarded as being secondary to those of monks. They know that in order to achieve a modicum of recognition or acceptance, they have to toil twice as hard as their male counterparts. Because this has been the situation for 2,500 years, it is with a kind of resignation or passive acceptance that they largely have continued to bear the brunt of discrimination in most facets of their lives.

Discrimination has so long been accepted in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, for example, that monks generally receive more substantial religious education, that monks alone can rise to the position of teachers and abbots of monasteries, that monks can expect greater offerings and pledges of support from the Buddhist lay communities, that the abodes of monks will be more solid and grand than those of nuns and that the halls of worship in monasteries, unlike those in nunneries, will be embellished with golden statues, rich wall paintings and rows of cushions and prayer tables. One Tibetan nunnery referred to in this study has a Buddha hall that is so decrepit that when the monsoon arrives, the disintegrating electrical wiring tacked to the walls causes anyone who touches the wall to receive an electric shock. At this time of year, nuns in the back row must remember not

\(^7\) In Appendix 3, The Contested History of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination in Tibet, there is a discussion, based on textual evidence, of instances of bhikṣuṇī ordination occurring in Tibet. The evidence suggests the existence in Tibet of some bhikṣuṇīs in earlier times.
Nuns are also discriminated against and occupy a lowly if not non-existent position in the monastic hierarchy in all the Theravāda traditions of Buddhism. In Thai Buddhism, they are not even śramaṇerikā, but are called maeji (mother renunciant), hold eight or ten precepts, compared to the 227 held by bhikṣus, and wear white robes, which are not considered to be the robes of an ordained person, but are the colour worn by lay devotees during important ceremonies. The same is true in Sri Lanka, where the bhikṣuṇī lineage disappeared some time in the eleventh century CE. The women, who are technically celibate laypeople, today dress in ochre robes and are called dasa śīlamata (ten-precept mother). Although there were bhikṣuṇīs in Burma sometime during the Pagan Period of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, for the many centuries since then Burmese monastic women have usually held only eight precepts and been called anagārikā or thilashin (keeper of the precepts). Their lives do, however, parallel those of the monks to a far greater extent than those of Thai or Sri Lankan renunciate women. Indigenous Nepalese nuns, who are also called anagārikā, hold a Theravāda ordination which was only revived in Nepal about sixty years ago from Burma. It is worth noting that since

8 Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, *Women in Thai Buddhism* (Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1991), pp. 36-44. In her chapter on Maeji, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh explains that they are not under the jurisdiction of the Thai Department of Religious Affairs, are not considered ordained persons and are denied legal status and its consequent benefits which are extended to monks. See pages 36-7 for her description of the etymology of the term maeji.


12 See Ingrid Jordt’s "Bhikkhuni, Thilashin, Mae-chii: Women who Renounce the World in Burma, Thailand and the Classical Pali Buddhist Texts" in *Crossroads*, Vol. 4, No. 1: 31-39, 1989, for a description of the lives of thilashin and of Burmese society’s attitudes to them. In Mi Mi Khaing, *ibid.*, a chapter is devoted to Burma’s renunciate women, including numbers of practitioners, daily life and descriptive insights into their nunneries or Gyaung.
1996, a small number of women from both Sri Lanka and Nepal have received full bhikṣuṇī ordination from monks of the Korean and Chinese Buddhist traditions.\(^\text{13}\)

It is only in the Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese traditions that nuns still have the opportunity to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination and to pursue a religious education equal to that undertaken by monks. Although the contemporary bhikṣuṇī tradition in Vietnam had succumbed in large part to the ravages of war and political upheaval, Buddhism has had a resurgence there since 1986. A renewed emphasis on religious education programs is attracting nuns in great numbers, with six new Buddhist institutes for nuns being established in the late eighties and early nineties. In Korea, women seeking a Buddhist education can choose between university and Buddhist institutes.\(^\text{14}\)

Very little has been written in English about the contemporary bhikṣuṇī tradition in Chinese Buddhism. Bhikṣuṇīs in Taiwan, Hong Kong and within Chinese Buddhist communities in south-east Asia are predominantly well-educated and literate. Opportunities exist for them to achieve positions as the abbesses of nunneries, lecturers in universities, delegates at international Buddhist conferences, authorities on Buddhism and, very importantly, as elders qualified to give bhikṣuṇī ordination to other nuns and train them in bhikṣuṇī Vinaya and the monastic discipline essential to life as a nun. Bhikṣuṇīs in the Chinese tradition are a vital and integral part of Buddhism, their numbers are greater than monks, and at the annual ordinations they far outnumber the male

\(^\text{13}\) In December 1996, a group of ten Sri Lankan women received bhikṣuṇī precepts in Sarnath, India, from Korean masters headed by Venerable Hong Keun Seo Am, while in February 1998, Chinese masters headed by Venerable Hsing-yi bestowed bhikṣuṇī precepts on an international group of women in Bodh Gaya, India.

candidates. It has been said to me on several occasions by monks in Taiwan that bhikṣuṇīs give Chinese Buddhism its strength and dynamism, that without their presence it would not be flourishing as it is. Bhikṣuṇīs are the 'pillars' of the temple of Chinese Buddhism.

Presently, women worldwide are questioning the traditional roles women have occupied in Buddhism and are applying to Buddhism the same feminist reasonings they are using in other areas of society. Putting aside the complex theories of 'essentialism' and 'postmodernism' being debated by today's feminist scholars,¹⁵ which spell out two very different ways of viewing 'woman', in simple terms, women are finding the state of affairs surrounding the situation of women in most Buddhist traditions unacceptable. It is therefore relevant and important to identify and describe a female monastic tradition which today appears to be based on principles of equality and merit.

In this dissertation I present a study of the contemporary Chinese Nuns' Order in Taiwan which is vital and successful, which is growing in size and is taking on the necessary elements of flexibility and adaptability to occupy a useful place in modern life. I demonstrate that these modern nuns are finding a way to integrate their lives with today's world and are shaping their monastic discipline around it, utilising their precepts and traditional Vinaya regulations as a living code which I have chosen to call 'vows in action'. However, it is also clear from the skillful and educated manner in which they are conducting their lives that they are continuing to uphold pure Vinaya tradition while at the same time ensuring through innovation the vibrancy and continuity of their lineage in accordance with the Vinaya teaching of the Buddha.

¹⁵ See Anne Klein, Meeting the Great Bliss Queen (Beacon Press, Mass., 1995), pp. 5-14, for a discussion of the essentialism-postmodernism debate.
A further aspect of this research, which is worthy of exploration, deals with a new and singular link between the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions as the possibility of full ordination from Taiwan and Hong Kong has begun to have a profound influence on Tibetan nuns. As the study grew, and the richness, vigour and dimension of the Chinese nuns' tradition became clearly evident, so grew my firm belief that nuns of all traditions should be enjoying the same opportunities and fullness of monastic life as Chinese nuns have enjoyed throughout the bulk of Chinese Buddhism's long history. The unacceptable situation in those Buddhist traditions where nuns cannot become fully ordained, or even become novices in the majority of cases, has therefore impelled me to include a comparative study of the Tibetan nuns' tradition where change is beginning to take place. It is important to examine the dynamics of these changes.

There have been recent moves towards introducing the Dharmagupta bhikṣuṇī lineage, referred to in Chinese as *Ssu fen lü* or Vinaya in Four Divisions, into the Tibetan tradition, and this significant new connection between the two monastic traditions makes such a parallel study of the two timely and of definite relevance. The shortage of scholarly material on the subject also makes a study and comparison of the two traditions compelling. Moreover, a comparison of these two traditions is also in order for another reason: Tibetan nuns do have the possibility to receive novice ordination, and this places them closer to Chinese bhikṣuṇīs on the ladder of monastic hierarchy than women in other Buddhist traditions who hold eight or ten precepts, with regard to monastic life and

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16 Dependent upon further research, there is a possibility that rather than introduce the Dharmagupta Vinaya lineage into the Tibetan tradition, the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage, which is already used for Tibetan bhikṣu and novice ordinations and which possesses the complete bhikṣuṇi Vinaya translated from Sanskrit, may be used. See Appendix 3, The Contested History of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination in Tibet, for a general historical survey of bhikṣuṇīs in Tibet and of the current issues surrounding moves for the establishment of a bhikṣuṇi ordination lineage in Tibetan Buddhism.
the opportunity to integrate their lives with a Vinaya tradition.

An unfortunate consequence of the lack of bhikṣunīs in Tibetan Buddhism, however, is the egregious discrimination levelled at novice nuns by the Tibetan bhikṣus, and a lack of educational and hierarchical opportunity. All through Tibetan Buddhist history the position of subservience which the nuns occupy in relation to the community of monks has disadvantaged them. The continuing intractability and biased hierarchical attitudes of certain members of the monkhood are even today hindering their drive for equivalence and recognition of their potential.

A major way to improve the situation for Tibetan nuns would be to present them with the possibility for full ordination as a bhikṣunī. By equalising the ordination status of monks and nuns, educational possibilities themselves would become less unequal and as a result, nuns would possess the confidence and the tools with which to fashion their own lives and destinies and become complete partakers in the Vinaya tradition and monastic life. Again, a parallel can be found in Catholic monasticism where nuns, lacking clearly defined hierarchical roles and the benefits of full participation in monastic function, are unable to develop complete certainty in their usefulness or a conviction of the validity of their daily path. Jo Ann Kay McNamara expresses this dilemma in her *magnum opus*, *Sisters in Arms*:

Nuns are not only peculiarly vulnerable to outside critics but by nature highly self-critical of their failure to conclude a quest for perfection whose goal always recedes.

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17 In using the term 'equivalence', I am following the intelligent choice of Kari Børreson, cited in Rosemary Radford Ruether's "Christianity" in *Women in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma (SUNY Press, Albany, 1987), p.207. Ruether explains the term as being preferable to 'equality', "because 'equality' suggests sameness, while 'equivalence' leaves open the possibility of physiological and psychological differences but rejects the notion that these differences are to be hierarchically interpreted. Rather, both men and women, although different in various respects, are nevertheless human persons of equal value" (the italics are Ruether's).
Religious women who lacked the structural advantages of offices and ordination to enhance their spiritual confidence could rarely trust their own virtue unless they achieved a visionary state in which divine assurances were granted them.  

In what represents an initial step to create equilibrium in the ordained community, a small number of Tibetan nuns have already received bhikṣuṇī ordination from Chinese masters in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and many others to whom I have spoken wish to do so. It has become evident through my prolonged association with Tibetan nuns that there is a great reservoir of potential which is only waiting to be tapped and put to use. Their enthusiasm, their indomitable determination and their spiritual resilience must place them in an excellent position when the obstacles to bhikṣuṇī ordination are removed and they can achieve for themselves the right to be fully admitted to the Order of Nuns.

This study aims to make contributions to the fields of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism with particular emphasis being placed upon the important offering women have made in the areas of spirituality and in the practice of Buddhist Vinaya discipline. It is also intended that this work may serve in part as a reminder of the valuable but largely ignored role women have played in Buddhism and help restore a balance in the many relevant academic fields of inquiry.

Within women's studies, there is increasing attention being paid to women's role in religion, both historically and contemporaneously, and this work also seeks to augment current religio-feminist thought by portraying a successful and positively acknowledged order of female religious practitioners. At the same time it concurs with

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19 See Rita Gross's articulate and outspoken work, *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1993), which clearly spells out the entire 2,500 year-old problem. Her observations and conclusions are accurate and penetrating - this book is not for the faint-hearted! However, I view with caution her tendency to advocate lay Buddhism as a more useful form of Buddhism, despite her well-presented argument defending the position of nuns and their attempts to reinstate the bhikṣuṇī lineage.
the findings of many modern feminist thinkers that Buddhist historiography has been androcentrically conceived and written and that the traditional cultural attitudes, both of religious patriarchs and of scholars, to Buddhist monasticism are generally strongly gender-biased and selective. Arai ventures in her PhD dissertation, "Zen Nuns: Living Treasures of Japanese Buddhism", that the solution to this one-sided presentation of who were and were not instruments of history is to expand "the scope of what is deemed important to include in historical accounts." Jo Ann Kay McNamara makes a similar observation concerning Christian nuns when she states:

No human institution is older than this sisterhood. Its impact has been felt throughout the world but, against all reasonable evidence, monastic historians traditionally refused to see anything but their cloister walls and enveloping veils. Reasoning that women do not build institutions or conquer new worlds or make history, the scribes who shape the past have ignored their untidy existence or simply accorded it a hasty nod before pressing forward with the more readily accessible history of male institutions. Still, religious women have a past that has much to teach us, not only about female creativity and accomplishments but about the possibility that women and men may yet enjoy a fuller humanity beyond the barriers of gender distinctions.

Tessa Bartholomeusz similarly observes:

The vision of Buddhism that female renunciants offer - both ordained and lay - has been blurred throughout the centuries by both a patriarchal religion disinterested in women's views, and by scholars, ever since the pioneering days of Buddhist scholarship. If scholars explored the religious experience of Buddhist women in Sri Lanka, more often than not, it was as an afterthought, an appendix, or a footnote. Only recently have we begun to view Buddhist women's religious experience as something other than as a supplement to men's. This recent trend is long overdue.

Feminist historiography assumes that women were active creators of history, but, as

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21 Jo Ann Kay McNamara, op. cit., p. 2.
22 Tessa Bartholomeusz, op. cit., p. 12.
stated above, that their achievements had not been considered worth documenting or have been lost. Building on this premise, my dissertation presents an account and analysis of two traditions of religious women who are currently creating religious history.

In the monastic traditions of the Eastern and Western religious systems which possess them there are many common elements. The organisation and discipline of the vowed life and the monastery, the concept of 'vocation' and the taking of precepts aimed at shaping an ethical life, the ideal of asceticism, enclosure and contemplation juxtaposed with engaged social action, and the stories of enlightened monastic exemplars all bear a similarity in many respects between Christianity and Buddhism.23 In view of the importance of inter-faith dialogue, it is envisaged that this study, with its emphasis on Buddhist monastic communities of women, will also enhance the understanding of monasticism as a viable and fulfilling way of life for those involved in it,24 and as being


24 Contrary to popular belief in which the traditional stereotypic nun frequently adopts the religious life because she is an orphan, a widow or a spinster, or because she has somehow fallen foul of society, my fieldwork, and the work of an increasing number of anthropologists studying religion, and of Buddhist scholars, uncover other quite different and affirmative motivations for women choosing the tonsure as their path of Buddhist practice. Their reasons, which are as various and individual as the number of nuns themselves, resonate in many respects with the sentiments expressed by some of the very first women who left the home life at the time of the Buddha. One poem, written at that time, conveys a powerful and positive conviction in the nun's life:

I gave up my house and set out into homelessness.
I gave up my child, my cattle, and all that I loved.
I gave up desire and hate.
My ignorance was thrown out.
I pulled out craving along with its root.
Now I am quenched and still.


Also see Section II.3 and Section III.3 for discussions concerning the lives, motivations, aims and self-perceptions of Chinese and Tibetan nuns, respectively.
of continuing relevance in the modern world.  

Buddhism, as a religion deeply grounded in monasticism whose very foundation was centred around the creation of a monastic order, stands in a very particular position in this regard: it is maintained that the continuance of the Buddha’s doctrine is fully dependent upon the survival of the Buddhist monastic Samgha. Not only must Buddhist monasticism be relevant to the modern world, but the very survival of Buddhism is directly contingent upon the survival of Buddhist nuns and monks. Although detractors of the Nuns’ Order may argue that it is enough that the Order of Monks’ existence ensures the survival of Buddhism, it is said that the four assemblies of the Buddha’s disciples consisting of fully ordained monks (bhikṣu) and fully ordained nuns (bhikṣunī), laymen (upāsaka) and laywomen (upāsikā), must exist for a place to be considered a central Buddhist land.

Finally, it is hoped that by explicating the aspirations and achievements of particular groups of ordained women, this work will impel Buddhism another step forward on the path towards a gender-balance which it has rarely had, towards reifying the vague notions historically and currently held regarding religious women in Buddhism and towards the

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25 In her thorough and broad treatment of Sōtō Zen Nuns mentioned above, Paula Arai makes the very incisive comment that “it is primarily in its symbolic value that the monastery affects the society. The highest ideals and deepest convictions of a culture are embodied in its monasteries. The monastery serves as an anchor for society, particularly during the shifting tides and sometimes torrential currents of adjustment to modernity." (op. cit., p. 9).

26 For a place to be considered a "central land", that is, one where Buddhism flourishes, all the above-mentioned four categories of followers must exist. See Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tshedroen, A Brief Survey of the Vinaya (Foundation for Tibetan Buddhist Studies, Hamburg, 1992), p. 31. The often-quoted statement widely attributed to the Buddha that Buddhism would disappear from the world in 500 years if women were admitted to the monastic order has not only been countered or reinterpreted in several scholarly works but has proven by the passage of more than 2,500 years already to be incorrect. (See Kajiyama, "Women in Buddhism", op. cit., p. 63; Jan Nattier, Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline (Asian Humanities Press, Berkeley, 1991), pp. 28-33 and Alan Sponberg, op. cit., pp. 3-36).
eradication of misogynistic and androcentric perceptions and portrayals of female monastics.

2 STRUCTURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Holmes Welch has made an excellent and scholarly study of Chinese Buddhism as practised on the Chinese mainland between 1900 and 1950. He has presented all the important aspects central to Buddhist practice within the monastic situation: monastery structure and organisation, daily programs and annual calendars, the occupants of the monastery and its office-bearers, the Abbot, ordination and entrance to the monastery, adherence to the Vinaya and coping with monastic discipline; all areas are covered by his comprehensive treatment of this enormous subject. However, in his preface he specifically points out that he "would exclude altogether nuns and nunneries, which could be more effectively studied by a woman." 27

The first time I read Holmes Welch's book, his decision impressed itself in my mind and, agreeing practical considerations and courtesy make it altogether more appropriate for a woman to study the workings of Buddhist nunneries, I determined to supply the missing piece, a study of the other half of Chinese Buddhist monasticism. Clearly, this is only a beginning and the way is open for others to further explore the depth of the Chinese bhikṣunī's experience.

I contextualise the study of the contemporary Chinese bhikṣunī tradition within the framework of modern Chinese society and culture in Taiwan. The large number of

nunneries and nuns testifies to the acknowledged place that female monastics occupy within Taiwanese society and to the high esteem in which they are almost universally held. The important role they play in their relations with the Buddhist lay community clearly indicates their indispensability and the mutual interdependence of the two communities of lay and monastic. The harmonious function of these two traditional roles ensures the economic support and continuance of the monastic order and the spiritual succour and contentment of the lay Buddhist. The dynamics of this relationship will be explored within the context of the chosen nunnery, which is the focus of Section II.

Taking as a case study the large, well-respected and fully-functioning Buddhist nunnery, Hsiang-kuang Temple, as well as brief examination where relevant of several other nunneries, the second section of the thesis examines post-1949 developments in the area of Buddhist monasticism in Taiwan with particular emphasis on the community of nuns. The study also analyzes important changes that have occurred within female monasticism as Taiwan moves into the modern world. It places in their historical context the vital traditional elements of monasticism and Vinaya tradition which cannot be dispensed with and which continue to play an essential role in the life of the nunnery.

This study shows ways in which the nuns have successfully introduced new monastic activities and have adapted some of the important traditions to modern life without violating the unbroken transmission of Vinaya lineage or its essential principles. In this way, discipline and flexibility can cooperate to maintain a balance of inner and outer, of mind and body, of microcosm and macrocosm. In the twentieth century, varied forms of social engagement are ensuring the continuing vitality and increasing popularity of monasticism in modern Taiwan, where every year hundreds of women, and fewer men,
are choosing the simple and structured life of the cloister over the apparent freedom and colour of worldly life. Some of the reasons for the continuing success of Chinese monastic Buddhism and for its enduring relevance and usefulness within Chinese society are indicated. The study touches on the historical foundations of the Chinese bhikṣuṇī lineage where necessary, linking tradition with the present.

By defining the structural organisation within the nunnery, its hierarchy and mode of operation, its routines and the opportunities offered for education and traditional religious practices, the study presents a view of the monastic lifestyle which is drawing in women in increasing numbers. Monasticism in any world religious system is frequently seen as a life of deprivation, asceticism and coldness, where the monastic is stripped of sensitivity, emotion, warmth and joy. If this were the case in Chinese Buddhist monasticism, then the real purpose of ordination and cenobitic religious life would be defeated. The nuns with whom this study is concerned exude an inner joy, peace and sense of purpose that is often lacking in those outside monastic life.

Through interviews and informal discussions with members of the nunnery, and by participant-observation, I investigate in the study the motivating forces behind the women's choices to become nuns. By identifying their personal backgrounds and their own religious values, the study shows what the nuns' understandings and expectations of ordination and life as a nun are. It also notes their opinions of where they fit in society, of what lay people believe nuns can offer and of whether the traditional reciprocal roles of the monastic Samgha and the lay Buddhist community are still being upheld.

The case study nunnery, Hsiang-kuang Temple, is a traditional nunnery housing over 100 bhikṣuṇīs, as well as novices and women training to become ordained. It is headed by an
abbess, Wu-yin Fa-shih, the third in her line since the temple was founded more than 25 years ago. The nunnery is set in hills covered in luxuriant semi-tropical vegetation outside Chiayi in south-central Taiwan. It offers a very good environment in which to learn about the traditional lives of nuns, to enter into their lives and to experience the peace, discipline and harmony which pervade the halls and cloisters like the scent of the frangipani tree which grows near the nunnery’s arched gateway.

It provides an ideal situation in which to undertake a scholarly research project of this nature. The quality of the nuns who live, study and work at Hsiang-kuang Temple and the high degree of monastic order and adherence to traditional Vinaya practice, including observation of the Rainy Season Retreat (Skt. varṣā; Ch. an-chū) and its closing ceremony, the Removal of Prohibitions, (Skt. pravāрапā; Ch. tzū-tzū), recitation of the Prātimokṣa sūtra (Skt. poṣadha; Ch. shuo-chieh) and the institution of two-year preordination training (Skt. śikṣamāṇā; Ch. shih-ch’u-mo-na) under a bhikṣuni teacher, makes this nunnery eminently representative of what keeps Buddhist monasticism applicable and relevant today. Even though its roots lie deep in Chinese history, Chinese Buddhist monasticism continues to be a vigorous living tradition.

Section III of the dissertation is concerned with Tibetan nuns. I have travelled twice to Tibet and have visited several nunneries, met many nuns and witnessed something of the difficulties under which they live. Their bravery and perseverance in the face of almost total lack of religious freedom is admirable. However, although it would be interesting to document the results of these observations, under the present régime and its strictly controlled monastic environment, accurate conclusions would be difficult to draw. It is therefore my intention to concentrate on Tibetan nuns in exile.
The female monastic tradition in Tibetan exile communities is still in the embryonic stages of development and growth; the number of nuns is small. Most of the nuns hold novice ordination, therefore discussion of their portrayal of Vinaya and monastic precepts differs from that presented in Section II. Because most present-day Tibetan nunneries are also small and follow one or another of the four Tibetan schools, I selected five nunneries which were suitable for field-work and participant-observation and where the nuns were open to mutual exchange and learning. One belongs to the Gelukpa school, one is non-sectarian or rimé (ris-med), one follows the Nyingma and two follow the Karma Kagyu school. Four are located in north-west India and one in Nepal: Dolma Ling (sGrol-ma gling), which is rimé, and Ganden Chöling (dGa’-ldan Chos-gling) Gelukpa nunnery in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, north India, Shugsep (Shug-gseb) Nyingma nunnery, also in Dharamsala, Samten Tse (bSam-gtan Tshes) Kagyu nunnery near Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh, north India, and Thrangu Tashi Jong (Khra’-gu bKra-shis Jong) Kagyu nunnery outside Kathmandu in Nepal. Other nunneries are referred to where relevant.

28 It is estimated that there were about 1,000 nuns living in India and Nepal in 1993 (Tibetan Women’s Association statistic, 1993), however, in recent years, increasing numbers of nuns are fleeing worsening religious persecution in Tibet, and by October 1998, 1,576 nuns were recorded as living in exile.

29 Tibetan Buddhism comprises four distinct schools: the Nyingma (rNying-ma), which is the oldest of the four, the Kagyu (bKa’-rgyud), the Sakya (Sa-skya) and the Geluk (dGe-lugs) School. Each school follows its own lineage masters, studies specific texts and performs ritual and ceremony in a slightly different form. They all, however, adhere to the particular tenets and ideals of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. H.H. the Dalai Lama has recently recognised the fifth school, that of Bön (Bon), the ancient pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. The first nunnery in exile of the Sakya school is currently (1996) being built near Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh, with provision being made for 100 nuns.

30 A non-sectarian initiative which emerged in eastern Tibet during the nineteenth century. Prominent figures of the time, including Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (Jam-dbyangs mKhyen-brtse’i dBang-po) and Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye (Jam-mgon Kong-sprul bLo-gros mTha’-yas), encouraged the integration of all four Tibetan Buddhist schools into one eclectic movement.

31 Shugsep nunnery has been newly established in north India, and should not be confused with the original Shugsep Nunnery in Tibet (see Section III.2.3).
The third section also illustrates how communities of nuns who are generally extended minimal support and acknowledgement from within their own culture, receive the barest essentials of religious education, live hard 'mountain' lives and are the subjects of a long tradition of discrimination, maintain monastic practice and discipline and live their lives according to Buddhist doctrine. In recent years, with a little input from some Western Buddhist nuns who have themselves received bhikṣuṇī ordination from Chinese masters and whose monastic precepts thus link the two traditions, and with the newly acquired knowledge of how to seek this higher ordination, they are gathering strength and momentum and are seeking for themselves the right to achieve their potential. Despite material poverty, their spiritual motivation and dedication imbue them with an inner beauty which is deeply rooted in the Himalaya. They are indeed the 'jewels' of Tibetan Buddhism.

Comparisons are made with life in the Chinese nunnery. Nunnery organisation, hierarchy, daily routine and monastic discipline are dealt with in the case of each nunnery and are viewed within the context of the Vinaya rules. The study identifies the religious and secular educational possibilities to which each group of nuns has access and how these possibilities are shaping their lives and attitudes. Higher secular education has only relatively recently been introduced for some groups of nuns, although the educational standard of nuns entering nunneries is generally higher than it was and remains to be in Tibet. In the light of the widening of their experience and the increased exposure to the West some nuns are encountering, I observed their adaptation to the twentieth century and have assessed some of their feelings on the meaning and relevance of the ordained life.

It is also important to compare the Tibetan nuns' education and opportunities with that of
monks, not as an exercise in once again highlighting gender-bias, but in order to demonstrate what it means to be deprived of being able to freely partake of the whole spectrum of religious education and its resultant fields of expression and vocation.\textsuperscript{32}

Members of the monk establishment have been able to pursue monastic careers to the full without suffering from discriminations of any kind within Tibetan society, while the opportunity for organised religious education has only recently been extended to nuns. Moreover, the monastic structure and the ease and self-confidence with which monks conduct themselves is in contrast to the unsure and diffident demeanour which generally characterises the nuns in their dealings with monks and others.\textsuperscript{33}

Having obtained case histories of many of the Tibetan nuns, I describe the personal backgrounds of some whose experiences are relevant to the study. By means of interviews and personal discussions, the study presents the reflections of some Tibetan nuns about their own lives and future possibilities, about the meaning and purpose of being a nun and about its difficulties. In addition, they share insights into their spiritual values and aspirations and their own thoughts about the standing of nuns within Tibetan society and culture.

\textsuperscript{32} Throughout this study I seek not to make sweeping generalisations and judgements concerning the discriminations clearly evident in the Buddhist literature and in Buddhist practice. Rather I hope to contribute constructive observations and draw meaningful conclusions as a means to begin restoring the gender-balance. This study takes to heart Paula Arai's warning that "even if the intent is to rectify past injustices, to assert that women have been universally oppressed is in and of itself an act of oppression. By not seeking to highlight the contributions of women...historians tacitly subjugate women and perpetuate the unfair treatment women might have experienced historically." Paula Arai, op. cit., p. 23.

\textsuperscript{33} The dichotomy between the two Orders is clearly evident at large gatherings of the Tibetan Samgha. I have been present at Confession ceremonies in the main Buddhist temple in Dharamsala, India, where the Tibetan nuns have crept tentatively into the temple at the given time for novice confession while the monks laughed out loud. Many nuns have stopped attending these ceremonies which only accentuate their lowly position within the monastic hierarchy and serve to perpetuate the feelings of embarrassment and worthlessness which they experience.
Some Chinese and Korean Buddhist masters have recently (1996-98) moved to introduce bhikṣuṇī ordination into those other traditions which lack it. The impact of this new development is pointed out, together with the apparent stalling by masters of other traditions whose views directly spring from established patterns within those Buddhist traditions and from the prevalent attitudes within the societies from which they derive. However, it should be said that within these traditions there are some exemplars of the true Buddhist spirit who want the four-fold Saṅgha to flourish as it has done in the past.

A small number of Tibetan nuns have turned to the Chinese Buddhist tradition to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination. Many more nuns wish to do so and are expressing themselves on this and other pressing issues, and articulating their hopes and fears for this important new development. Clearly, Tibetan society, in which there does not appear to have been a customary obligation to support nuns to any great extent, will also need to review its attitudes with regard to them when they receive full ordination in any numbers, as will the hierarchy of bhikṣus whose traditionally dominant position is already beginning to be challenged. The sociological ramifications of the raising of the status of nuns are complex and interesting, and, based on interviews with Tibetans in many walks of life, this work examines various points of view.

The ranges of difference between Taiwanese and Tibetan Buddhist monasticism for women are compared and contrasted where pertinent throughout the text, along with the roles and potential of their nuns, and their relative standing within their respective societies. The study also draws relevant comparisons between the present condition of

34 See footnote 13.
35 Reliably acquired transcripts of comments made by some monks and abbots of high standing clearly illustrate the trepidation they feel at the prospect of a Tibetan Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha.
the Chinese Nuns' Order in Taiwan, steeped as it is in the history and refinement of Chinese cultural tradition, and the harder circumstances of the Tibetan Nuns' Order, springing from the harsh roughness of the high Tibetan plateau but possessing as a result of that its own strength and resilience.

The study touches on possible reasons why women, who can experience relative freedom within lay Tibetan society, are discriminated against and restricted in their religious pursuits when they become monastics.36 Conversely, in Chinese society "it would be hard to exaggerate the extent to which the traditional high culture allows women significance only as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers of men",37 and yet in Taiwan, Chinese nuns today enjoy a freedom, equality and respect only dreamt of in most other Buddhist traditions. The sociological dynamics of this contradiction in terms raise profound questions.

In Section IV, Looking Ahead, I note where the two traditions of Taiwanese and Tibetan

36 This statement requires qualification. There is considerable speculation as to the real status of women in Tibetan society. Scholars differ in their interpretation of this largely uncharted area of sociological inquiry. Beatrice Miller, "Views of Women's Roles in Buddhist Tibet", in Studies in History of Buddhism, edited by A.K. Narain (B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1980) concludes that Tibetan women enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom and status, in particular in the economic field. Anne Klein, "Primordial Purity and Everyday Life: Exalted Female Symbols and the Women of Tibet", in Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, edited by Clarissa Atkinson et al, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1985) points out that "the presence of an egalitarian principle [Buddhism] cannot automatically translate into an egalitarian society." (p. 132) and that, although Tibetan women "apparently had more autonomy and status than their Asian sisters in China, Japan, or India, in general their lot did not mirror the exalted status of the symbolised female." (p. 134). Women were consistently excluded from areas of power, politics and serious monasticism, although they could achieve success in less monastically oriented orders. Klein maintains that religion, in this case Buddhism, has been unsuccessful in applying its basic tenets to the social situation. As articulated in the present study, this basic prejudice and apathy has extended into the religious sphere. Also see Barbara Nimri Aziz, "Moving Towards a Sociology of Tibet", Tibet Journal, Vol. 12, No. 4: 72-86, 1987, in which she lucidly presents compelling evidence of the lack of egalitarian attitudes in Tibetan society and outlines forceful arguments for the initiation of a sociology of Tibet.

nuns find themselves at the close of the twentieth century, and I briefly suggest possible future directions the two nuns' traditions may take.

I posit ways in which nuns of the two traditions could learn from one another and benefit from one another's particular strengths. While Tibetan nuns have set an example of constancy in very hard circumstances, an example from which nuns of other Buddhist traditions can learn, I also point out the relevancy of the Taiwanese female monastic model for the Tibetan nuns' tradition and for twenty-first century Buddhism.

Having examined the implications of the possible introduction of the Dharmagupta bhikṣuṇī lineage into Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition, or, alternatively, the use of the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī lineage for ordaining nuns, I indicate obstacles that may be encountered, adaptations that may be needed, chances for success and potential future roles of Tibetan nuns in Tibetan Buddhism.

3 METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The qualitative nature of the research needed for this dissertation necessarily demanded extensive field-work within the Chinese and Tibetan cultural milieux. I spent a total of eight months in India and Nepal and five months in Taiwan, between 1994 and 1997, gathering data and conducting interviews with nuns, monks and lay Buddhists. I lived in nunneries where possible and undertook periods of participant-observation, an accepted anthropological method, in some of them in order to enter experientially as far as possible into the lives of the nuns and to gain their trust and their understanding of my purpose.
referred to Spradley's instructive introduction to participant-observation and ethnographic research.38

I based my methodology primarily on Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai's *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*.39 This work, which contains essays by a group of feminist scholars and oral historians, is a treasure-house of pertinent advice and observation. They collectively espouse listening and cultivating skill in interpretation, planning questions aimed at letting the women being interviewed open up, and avoiding cutting them off or steering them too strongly. They also suggest holding accepted theories in abeyance where necessary and creating a climate of empathy, mutuality, encouragement and comfort, where, at times, the prevailing methodological model of separating researcher and researched in a clear and hierarchical way is not either relevant or desirable. They point out the unavoidable exploitative and intrusive aspect of field-work and the objectification and utilisation of others for the purposes of the field-worker where betrayal, exposure and deception, either inadvertent or deliberate, are ever-present possibilities. I also relied upon the ethical principles of oral research and interview outlined by Spradley in *Participant-Observation*.40

There is no need to repeat detailed and technical discussions concerning anthropological field-work methodology and ethnographic research principles, for these have been well covered by the authors to whom I refer in this study. I do, however, wish to briefly discuss participant-observation which, although an important element of anthropological field-work, can have shortcomings. If adhered to purely academically and with the rigid

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40 See footnote 38.
demarcation of 'researched' and 'researcher', 'insider' and 'outsider', it can build walls which are difficult to break down. It can lead to a strong sense of 'I' and 'them' which obstructs frankness and exchange.

Paula Arai also raises the question of this potential for lack of interchange in her PhD dissertation:

Rather than there being distinct categories of insider and outsider, there is, rather, a continuum that ranges from complete difference in gender, culture, race, age, class, religious orientation, etc. between the researcher and the researched and relative similarity between them. The rubric insider-outsider, therefore, must be used with extreme caution...41

In order to minimise these problems, I encouraged an atmosphere of mutual exchange and the sharing of ideas and experiences. Rather than let the nuns relate their stories to me as a silent listener, I participated in the conversations as a fellow nun.42 I approached the nuns with an attitude of flexibility and receptivity and with a view to attending to them and their stories and fitting my findings into an open agenda that I could modify in the light of what I saw and heard rather than adhering to a rigid plan and forcing responses to fit it, thereby curtailing or possibly destroying them. Although I prepared set questionnaires for the abbess of Samten Tse in India and the abbess and a selection of nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple in Taiwan,43 a large amount of my information was gathered in an informal manner during casual conversations and while joining with the

41 Paula Arai discusses this dilemma at some length in her PhD dissertation, op. cit., pp. 42-44.
42 In Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, it is stated that many feminist researchers have turned towards such interactions with their subjects, and that "sisterhood" is not merely a better process, but that it yields better results. They suggest breaking free of androcentric research models (p. 143) and in this study I have endeavoured to build a creative, but balanced, model where a reciprocal and collaborative relationship is formed between interviewer and interviewees without losing altogether the distance which makes objectification possible.
43 See Appendix 4 for the full questionnaires given to Venerables Wu-yin and Khandro Rinpoche and the Chinese and Tibetan nuns who participated in this study.
nuns in a range of activities, both institutional and recreational. Although I had a rough plan of the direction of the discussion and of answers I hoped to gather, I was careful not to let my agenda intervene and perhaps spoil an emerging potentially dynamic and fruitful interview.

Documenting the lives of religious women is rewarding and yet it demands painstaking efforts. There is a great responsibility as far as possible neither to oversimplify nor to misrepresent what are rich and complex lives being lived on a number of levels. Spiritual life is something which is largely unseen because it concerns mental aspirations, inner development and the annihilation of self-interest, and although it may be a relatively easy matter to spend time in a nuns' community and accurately document their daily routines and activities and their external and seemingly prosaic endeavours, it requires deeper understanding and penetration of these lives to portray motivations, feelings, beliefs and attitudes. In addition, operating within the normal framework of conventional ethnographical approach is not wholly relevant to the monastic situation due to the introspective demeanour of the nuns and their unconcern with projecting a particular image. They are not naturally talkative, preferring questions and discussions to embrace a Buddhist orientation.

Two factors helped make it possible to present the picture that follows. Without my female gender I would not even have gained entry to female monastic establishments in

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44 In The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology, edited by M. Eliade and J. Kitagawa, Wilfred Smith states in his essay, "Comparative Religion: Whither - and Why?", "We are studying, then, something not directly observable. Let us be quite clear about this, and bold." (p. 34) and in his footnote 6 on the same page he says, "the study of religious faith ... must be a study not only of tangible externals but of human hopes and aspirations and interpretations of those externals." He goes on to say, "The externals of religion - symbols, institutions, doctrines, practices - can be examined separately ... But these things are not in themselves religion, which lies rather in the area of what these mean to those that are involved." (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1959), p. 35.
the first place. Secondly, my own life as a bhikṣuṇī placed me in a favourable position to live and learn in a nuns’ community and to be accepted as a sister by that community. The nuns were under no pressure to justify their choice of a religious life to a fellow nun. As a practising nun, I had access to areas of the temple and to elements of the nun's life, such as twice-monthly Prātimokṣa recitation, which are closed to outsiders. As a bhikṣuṇī I am committed to and conversant with the life of a nun and the function and purpose of a nuns' temple, while as an academic I endeavour to be objective, and place my findings within the context of monasticism, women's studies and Buddhism.

I venture to suggest that my being a bhikṣuṇī who shared the nuns' commitment to a way of life, facilitated a depth of exchange and frankness which would have been difficult to achieve had I been a lay scholar. It is interesting to note the similar experience of Robert E. Buswell. In his book, *The Zen Monastic Experience*, he describes his time as a monk in Korea and discusses this issue at some length:

> From my own career in the monastery, I know that many monks dislike discussing with outsiders issues they consider irrelevant to their "homeless" (ch’ulga ) life, since an interest in such matters would suggest an attachment to the world outside the monastery....I would even go so far as to say that only by living together with the monks as a monk does the researcher have much hope of gaining an accurate picture of the monks' lives and the motivations that underlie it.

Furthermore, my position as a woman and a bhikṣuṇī also automatically lessened the

45 Being a Buddhist nun and therefore to some extent an ‘insider’, I was able to portray the monasticism of Buddhist nuns in a way they themselves accept. As W.C. Smith says in "Comparative Religion: Whither - and Why?" (ibid.), "On the external data about religion, of course, an outsider can by diligent scholarship discover things that an insider does not know and may not be willing to accept. But about the meaning that the system has for those of faith, an outsider cannot in the nature of the case go beyond the believer; for their piety is the faith, and if they cannot recognize his portrayal, then it is not their faith that he is portraying." (p. 42).

relative gap between researched and researcher and reduced the polarities of the 'continuum' mentioned by Arai above. However, I was also aware that at times an artificial situation may have been created for my benefit, that my presence may have influenced temple routine and procedure in some cases and that some of my questions may have been answered with what it was thought I wanted to hear. It was also clear that, as a Westerner, although speaking both Chinese and Tibetan reasonably well, but without native-speaker fluency, I may have missed certain nuances. I have taken these limitations into account. For technical discussions with monks or abbesses, I used an interpreter to ensure accuracy.

In addition to field-work within Buddhist nunneries, I conducted research in Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist society at large. In India, I questioned His Holiness the Dalai Lama and other knowledgeable Tibetan monks on the subject of Tibetan Vinaya and the position of nuns in Tibetan Buddhism. I also interviewed Geshe Tashi Tsering, the monk who is heading the research and translation into Tibetan of Chinese Dharmagupta Vinaya texts. I carried out interviews with Tibetans from across Tibetan society to ascertain their attitudes to nuns and their views on the position of nuns within Tibetan Buddhism, as well as of women within Tibetan society in general.

Taiwan offers wide scope for field-work and research into Chinese Buddhist nuns. I visited many nunneries located in Taipei city and around the island and I also explored the various roles nuns play in Taiwan society: living or working in nunneries, small centres, research institutes, universities, schools, prisons, hospitals, Buddhist societies, associations and libraries.

I interviewed and held long and interesting discussions with Venerable Heng-ching, a
bhikṣuṇī professor at Taiwan National University, as well as with the abbesses of several nunneries and the abbots of a couple of monasteries housing both monks and nuns. I talked with a past and the present chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association (ROC) and the present head of the Chinese Young Buddhist Association. I associated with, and in many instances became friends with, Buddhist laity from all age groups and varied walks of life. Through participating in Buddhist functions with them I was able to observe their relationship with and attitudes to monks and nuns.

My intention has been to describe not just events, external situations and lives, but to enter as far as possible into those events, situations and lives and portray the people themselves who are an integral part of them. As the nuns are my primary sources, I have also been committed to presenting their stories and experiences from their own viewpoint, as the subjects of their own lives. By so doing, I present a tapestry of the aspirations, attitudes and spirituality interwoven within the religious lives of some of the monastic women of two of Buddhism's great traditions.

**Terminology of Nuns and their Communities**

There is no need to discuss at length the shades of meanings of the many specialised terms and titles used in this study or enter into feminist arguments on the merits or drawbacks of utilising certain terms designating gender. In most instances the context of the terms in question renders their meaning self-evident. However, several terms remain ambiguous and have been variously interpreted and translated by scholars, researchers

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47 I have been impelled by the feminist principle as articulated by Miranda Shaw that, "One of the guiding assumptions is that, regardless of how men may view them, women experience and interpret their own lives as the subjects of their own lives..... A women's history must seek to determine how women interpreted their own lives, areas in which they experienced authority and power, whether they shared men's views of women, whether they resisted male authority or contested for power..." (Passionate Enlightenment, p. 196).
Tibetan Buddhism does not have nuns, if by nuns one means fully ordained female monastics. The tradition of novice, getsulma (*dge-tshul-ma*), ordination has endured throughout Tibetan Buddhist history to this day, and has so much come to be regarded as all that is available to religious women that female Tibetan novices are simply called nuns in English. Not to call them nuns would be to belittle their commitment, which is no less than that of fully ordained bhikṣunīs elsewhere. Technically speaking, they are novices, training to be nuns, and this was generally the case among ethnic Tibetan novices until 1984 when the first four present-day novices received their full ordination in Hong Kong.

In order to simplify matters and to be able to include all Tibetan monastic women within a single appellation, I have used the generic term 'nun' to refer to all women with novice or higher ordination who have made a permanent commitment and are living the religious life in a temple or community. When it is necessary, I refer to novices or fully ordained nuns specifically. Occasionally, use of the Tibetan word for bhikṣunī, gelongma (*dge-slóng-ma*), is called for. Most Tibetan Buddhist male monastics over the age of twenty have taken the vows of full ordination, and so for them I have retained use of the terms 'monk' or 'bhikṣu', unless otherwise clearly specified.

Within the Chinese Buddhist tradition, this confusion of appellation does not arise because there exists a complete, well-defined ordination system. For women, this consists of postulant (*hsing-che*), probationer (*shih-ch'a-mo-na*), novice (*sha-mi-ni*) and fully ordained nun (*pi-ch'iū-ni*). I therefore use these four English terms to distinguish Chinese Buddhist women on the various levels of monastic achievement, and I use the
broad generic term, 'nun', when describing female Chinese monastics in general. In some cases I use the Sanskrit originals of *sha-mi-ni* and *pi-ch'iu-ni*, namely śramaṇerikā and bhikṣunī. A corresponding system exists for male monastics and I have employed consistent use of the relevant terms, novice and monk, śramaṇera and bhikṣu. The title, Fa-shih (Dharma Master or Teacher) is used universally throughout Taiwan to designate both monks and nuns, while Shih-fu (Master or Teacher) is a respectful form of address.

I have endeavoured to avoid the use of such gender-exclusive and generalised terminology as 'monks' and 'monastery' unless it is specifically warranted. The system of terminology I use makes clear the roles and achievements of both monks and nuns in their own right as participating members of the Buddhist Saṃgha, or 'assembly', 'congregation', which collective term subsumes within it the four groups of Buddhist followers mentioned above. Until recently, however, the term 'saṃgha' was usually employed to specify only monks and nuns, which is, in fact, its original meaning, but a modern trend has emerged which includes all Buddhist practitioners, or individual groups of Buddhists around a teacher, within the generic term 'saṃgha'. Therefore, where any ambiguity may arise within this study, the term 'saṃgha' is preceded by the qualifiers 'ordained' or 'monastic'.

Another group of terms which may require clarification are those used to describe the places of residence of groups of monks and nuns. The term 'nunnery' is a generally accepted designation for a community of nuns of any size, however some gender-exclusive translations continue to appear where the Chinese word *ssu* is simply rendered as 'monastery' regardless of whether nuns or monks live there. *Ssu* is also translated as 'temple', which is gender-neutral, and in this study I predominately refer to the Chinese
case-study nunnery, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, as 'temple' in keeping with how Hsiang-kuang Ssu nuns themselves refer to their nunnery when using English. The Chinese word specifically used for residences of nuns, 安, is rarely used today in Taiwan, although it is in frequent use in mainland China as is 堂, or 'hall'. In Taiwan, I encountered widespread use of the term 翎舍, variously translated as 'pure abode', 'hermitage', 'study' and 'Buddhist temple', and especially applied to small communities of either monks or nuns.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the majority of monastics' residences are termed gompa (dGon-pa), which is translated as 'monastery', 'hermitage' or 'vihāra' and derives from the word dgon meaning 'wilderness' or 'solitary place'. I also translate dGon-pa as nunnery, where relevant, to ensure specific acknowledgement of the numerous nuns' communities both inside Tibet and in exile. I avoid use of the common Tibetan term for a nunnery, Ani dGon-pa because of the condescending connotation of the prevalent appellation for Tibetan nun, Ani, meaning 'auntie'.

Small hermitages and mountain retreats in isolated regions where meditators live in solitude or in small groups are often called ri-trö (ri-khrod). Many Tibetan monastic communities, including several of the nunneries described in this study, include in their name the word chö-ling or ling (chos-gling/gling), whose original meaning was "a monastery isolated in its greatness and separate from other jurisdiction" but when literally translated means 'garden of Dharma'.

Other terms which occur will be clarified, where necessary, in the text or by means of footnotes.

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4. SCHOLARLY BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

The bulk of significant works consulted during the course of the study can be grouped into six categories:

1. Buddhism's Indian origins, including Vinaya;
2. Chinese Buddhism;
3. Tibetan Buddhism;
4. Buddhist women in general and other Buddhist traditions in particular;
5. Female monastics in non-Buddhist religions;
6. Feminist religious analyses and methodologies.

This section will follow the above groupings in drawing attention to works that have been useful in preparing this study, which have made a major contribution to the relevant fields of inquiry, and which, in some cases, indicate the current status of studies in these fields.

Although the history of Buddhism, Vinaya and monasticism are areas of research which have long been under the scrutiny of the scholar of Indian and Buddhist history, the important role women have occupied and continue to do has been almost entirely neglected until very recently. Several new works have been published during the course of this study which significantly augment the available material in this area. The present study aims to fill another lacuna by offering a comparative study of two traditions of contemporary Buddhist nuns, and it could not have been completed without the many erudite works and scholarly traditions on which it draws.

1. **Buddhism's Indian origins, including Vinaya**

Studies concerning the origin and growth of Buddhism in India and the foundation and
rise of Buddhist monasticism need no introduction, however I will mention several helpful works particularly relevant to this study which I consulted and to which I refer the interested reader who may seek background information. Hirakawa Akira's comprehensive discussion of Indian Buddhism, *A History of Indian Buddhism*, which was first published in 1990, covers the period of early Buddhism through Nikāya or sectarian Buddhism, to the beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the first century BCE. It includes sections on the organisation and development of the monastic Orders, Buddhist doctrine and also an extensive bibliography. Several well-known and masterly works deal with Indian Buddhist monasticism, notably, Sukumar Dutt's *Early Buddhist Monachism*, and *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* and Mohan Wijayaratna's *Buddhist Monastic Life*. This last book contains chapters on the evolution of the various categories of monastic precepts throughout the life of the Buddha and beyond.

A fascinating comparative study of Buddhist and Jaina monasticism is *Studies in Buddhist and Jaina Monachism*, by Dr. Nand Kishore Prasad, which includes comparisons of the major texts concerning the rules and regulations of the two monastic Orders, the formation and development of their two Orders, their major religious observances and their monastic structure and administration. This study also highlights several elements in the Order of Jaina Nuns which became the precedents for the establishment and code of rules of the Buddhist Nuns' Order.

A more general but nevertheless wide-ranging and representative volume which seeks to cover the entire 2,500 year history of Buddhism from its inception in India and including its spread throughout the East and its recent introduction in the West, is *The World of Buddhism: Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture*, by Heinz Bechert and
Richard Gombrich. *Studies in History of Buddhism*, edited by A.K. Narain and *Buddhism: A Modern Perspective* by Charles S. Prebish both contain collections of essays and articles, many of which are relevant to the present study. I will deal with them separately in the appropriate sections. One such article appearing in *Studies in History of Buddhism* is Charles S. Prebish's "Vinaya and Pratimoksa: The Foundation of Buddhist Ethics" which analyses the structure of the Vinaya in a clear manner.

Several scholars have made textual analyses and annotated English translations of relevant Vinaya texts from the various extant schools, including Gustav Roth's *Bhikṣuṇī-Vinaya Manual of Discipline for Buddhist Nuns* (Arya-Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādin) and Akira Hirakawa's *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns*, a translation of the Chinese version of the Mahāsāṃghika Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya.

I have also referred to I.B. Horner's valuable translation from the Pāli Vinaya of the Bhikkhunivibhaṅga in Volume 3 of *The Book of the Discipline* (Volume XIII of *The Sacred Books of the Buddhists* series) and more specifically to her enduring and pivotal work, *Women Under Primitive Buddhism*. *Vinaya Texts* (Parts I, II, III) (from *The Sacred Books of the East*), translated from the Pāli by T.W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg), and particularly Part III which contains the Tenth Khandhaka (On the Duties of Bhikkhunīs) is also a valuable reference resource. John C. Holt also analyzes the disciplinary rules of the Buddhist monastic and the history and structure of the Vinayapitaka as presented in the Pāli Canon in his book, *Discipline: The Canonical Buddhism of the Vinayapitaka*.

Anukul Chandra Bannerjee presents in "Sarvāstivāda Literature", his PhD dissertation, a comprehensive survey of Sarvāstivāda literature, including an extensive examination of
Vinaya texts in existence and an analytical study of the Vinaya-vastu of the Tibetans.

W. Pachow's *A Comparative Study of the Prātimokṣa* (1955) remains a valuable source of information on the Prātimokṣa. Using the Prātimokṣa text of the Sarvāstivāda School as the standard text, he compares the Prātimokṣa of various versions of extant Vinaya texts, namely, Pāli, Dharmagupta, Mahiśāsaka, Kāśyapīya, Mahāsāṃghika, Mūlasarvāstivāda and the Tibetan text of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. He also includes a concordance table of the Prātimokṣa Rules showing where the Rules differ from each other in their categories in each of the texts discussed.

Another more recent comparative study of the Prātimokṣa, focusing entirely on the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya, is Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhuṇī Pātimokkha* in which she takes the categories of precepts in turn and examines their wording and location in relation to each of six extant Vinaya Schools, namely Pāli, Dharmagupta, Mahiśāsaka, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda.

Charles S. Prebish has translated into English for comparative purposes two Sanskrit Prātimokṣa texts specifically for bhikṣus, those of the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Mūlasarvāstivādins, in his short book *Buddhist Monastic Discipline*, and he also includes an overview of the rise of Buddhist monasticism.

Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen has produced a short overview of the Tibetan Vinaya with comparisons to the Theravāda and Dharmagupta bhikṣuṇī traditions, *A Brief Survey of the Vinaya*. An interesting and informative article by Dr. Meena V. Talim entitled "Buddhist Nuns and Disciplinary Rules", which appeared in the *Journal of the University of Bombay*, presents her analysis of the reasons for female asceticism and renunciation, the admission of women into the Buddhist monastic Order and a clear comparison of the
E. Frauwallner's *The Earliest Vinaya and the Beginnings of Buddhist Literature* seeks to shed light on the origins of the earliest Vinaya texts, his concern being principally with that part of the Vinaya known as the *Skandhaka* or exposition of the Buddhist monastic rules. *The Age of Vinaya* undertakes what its author, G.S.P. Misra, terms "a systematic reconstruction of what we may call the first period of Buddhism from the Vinayic record in its Pāli version." He includes chapters on the development of the Vinaya, religious practices and beliefs, the doctrinal and ethical basis of Buddhist discipline, many of the fine details of Buddhist monasticism and its observances, education and several sections on society, politics, art and the economy of the times.

Satis Chandra Vidyabhusana's translation of the Tibetan Pratimokṣa of the Mūlasarvāstivāda School, *So-sor-thar-pa*, is an early work which also compares the rules with those given in the Pāli Canon. Alexander Csoma de Körös also presents a highly technical analysis of the Tibetan Dulwa (*Dul-ba*) or Vinaya in which he includes the section on gelongma or bhikṣuṇiṣ. This article appears as "Tibetan Studies" in the *Collected Works of Alexander Csoma de Körös* edited by J. Terjék.

In a ground-breaking work published in 1996, Karma Lekshe Tsomo presents a comparative analysis of the Chinese Dharmagupta and the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhikṣuṇī Pratimokṣa Sūtras, *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Buddhist Monastic Ethics for Women*. In this book she pertinently points out the philological and phenomenological nature of many of the above-mentioned works and the great need for feminist analysis and an experiential approach almost completely lacking in studies focusing on Buddhist monasticism. In *Sisters in Solitude* she endeavours to combine the precepts of bhikṣuṇiṣ and bhikṣus according to the Pāli Canon.
scholarly and objective approach with the experiential and practical even though the study necessarily centres primarily on the textual tradition. By having rendered the original texts into modern English and by including a chapter entitled "Linking Past and Future", Karma Lekshe Tsomo paves the way, as she herself says, to "move from the textual tradition to an understanding of the lifestyle as it was, and still is, actually experienced."\textsuperscript{49}

2. Chinese Buddhism

Although works in this and the following section (Tibetan Buddhism) are also very often phenomenological or historical in nature, they are also valuable resources for a study such as the present one. I refer particularly to J. Prip-Møller's monumental and painstakingly researched work, \textit{Chinese Buddhist Monasteries}, which presents in extraordinary detail through examples of existing monasteries, the layout of the typical Buddhist monastery, and meticulously gathered information relating to the ordination unit, its ceremonies and development, and monastic hierarchy and daily life. Such valuable information is otherwise unrecorded by the modern scholar except in briefer form in the excellent series of books by Holmes Welch. In particular, \textit{The Practice of Chinese Buddhism: 1900-1950} is a historical survey which presents informative sections on all aspects of twentieth-century Chinese monastic life, including the duties and positions of monastery staff, the meditation and Buddha recitation halls, observance of the rules, the abbot, monastic rites, the monastic economy, varieties of temples and entering the Samgha and embarking on a monastic career.

Lancaster, presents a useful analysis of the significance of the *Ch'ing kuei* (code of conduct) in early Buddhist monasticism and also a discussion of the origins of the *Pai-chang ch'ing kuei* in particular. A second article, H. Hackmann's "Pai Chang Ch'ing Kuei, The Rules of Buddhist Monastic Life in China", which appeared in *T'oung Pao* in 1908, also contributes to understanding the major role the *Ch'ing kuei* has always played in the Chinese Buddhist monastery. He equates its authority with that which the Monastic Rule of St. Benedict has held for the Christian monastic.

There are a number of useful guides which provide a background to the earlier history of Buddhism in China. An important survey of Chinese Buddhist history is Kenneth Ch'en's *Buddhism in China*. In addition, E. Zurcher's *The Buddhist Conquest of China* makes valuable contributions to the study of the history and development of Chinese Buddhism.

On a more experiential level, Chen-hua's intensely personal and frank account of his own life as a Buddhist monk, *In Search of the Dharma: Memoirs of a Modern Chinese Buddhist Pilgrim*, lends valuable insights into the monastic life in recent times, both on the Chinese mainland and in Taiwan.

Kathryn Ann Tsai's *Lives of the Nuns*, an updated translation of the *Pi-ch'iu-ni Chuan*, compiled in or about 516 CE by Shih Pao-ch'ang and also translated into English by Li Jung-hsi, presents inspiring and insightful biographies of 65 nuns. Her comprehensive introduction and annotations make this work of great value and, in that it deals with the lives of female religious practitioners, it must take a place in the forefront of the recent movement to redefine Buddhist historiography. Kathryn Tsai has also contributed a commentarial essay, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women: the First Two
Centuries", to the work *Women in China: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, edited by Richard W. Guisso and Stanley Johannesen. Lily Hsiao Hung Lee's *The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and Its Social Ramifications*, also makes a contribution to knowledge and understanding of the life of Buddhist nuns in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

Both Nancy Schuster ("Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism", in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, edited by Yvonne Y. Haddad and Ellison B. Findly) and Miriam Levering ("The Dragon Girl and the Abbess of Mo-shan: Gender and Status in the Ch'an Buddhist Tradition", in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*) address from a feminist perspective the issue of woman's portrayal in Chinese Buddhist literature and practice.

3. Tibetan Buddhism

Interestingly, there are as yet few studies relevant to this dissertation to be consulted on this subject, for, as Barbara Nimri Aziz says in her article, "Moving Towards a Sociology of Tibet" (*Tibet Journal*), "As yet...there is no sociology of Tibet" (p. 72). She goes on to suggest that a good place to begin such sociological study is with the analysis of Tibetan women, and her article presents case studies of women in various situations. Diametrically opposed to Aziz's largely grim conclusions about the position of women in Tibetan society, Beatrice D. Miller ("Views of Women's Roles in Buddhist Tibet", in *Studies in History of Buddhism*, edited by A.K. Narain) maintains that in general Tibetan women enjoyed considerable freedom and personal power.

Hanna Havnevik's *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns: History, Cultural Norms and Social Reality* is
a predominantly anthropological approach to the study of Tibetan nuns, however its value
cannot be underestimated in that, at the present time, it remains almost the only such study.

Christoph von Führer-Haimendorf has contributed a detailed and valuable anthropological
analysis of Bigu nunnery in northern Nepal in his article "A Nunnery in Nepal", which
appeared in Kailash. He discusses the origins of the nunnery, its hierarchy, routine,
economic base, composition and links with the local communities. Another
anthropological discussion of Tibetan monastic communities is Barbara Aziz's "Views
from the Monastery Kitchen: Fieldwork with Tibetan Monks and Nuns", also appearing
in Kailash.

Two collections of hagiographies about Tibetan women presented, at the time of their
publication in the 1980s, almost the first glimpse into the lives of saintly Tibetan women.
Both Tsultrim Allione in Women of Wisdom and Janis Willis in Feminine Ground
examine the lives of exalted women of the past as stories to be shared as sources of both
inspiration and education.

Several histories of Tibet have been consulted for background knowledge, including M.
Goldstein's A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951, Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa's Tibet, A
Political History and D.L. Snellgrove's A Cultural History of Tibet. Both Charles Bell's
Religion of Tibet and Giuseppe Tucci's The Religions of Tibet are otherwise excellent
surveys of Tibetan Buddhism that neglect nuns or female religious practitioners.

4. Buddhist women in general, and other Buddhist traditions in particular

As mentioned elsewhere, there is a paucity of information concerning women in
Buddhism, however several significant works demand mention. Diana Paul's innovative work, *Women in Buddhism*, although published almost twenty years ago, is still quoted by feminist scholars of Buddhism. She examines the diverse roles of women in society and religion, using traditional Buddhist texts, and draws attention to several well-known sūtras in this context.

Susan Murcott's translation of the *Therīgāthā*, *The First Buddhist Women*, along with her commentary, also offers valuable insight into the lives of early Buddhist renunciate women and shows that women can renounce family life, live in simple monastic communities, devote their time wholeheartedly to spiritual endeavours and can equally attain the highest state of enlightenment. *Sakyadhītā: Daughters of the Buddha*, edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, consists of a collection of talks given at the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns in Bodh Gaya. It articulates the efforts of modern nuns and laywomen to initiate action on issues "of vital concern to Buddhist women".


Little has been written about the Buddhist women renunciants of south and south-east Asia. One chapter of Mi Mi Khaing's *The World of Burmese Women* deals in detail with Burmese women renunciants, *Thilashin*, while Ingrid Jordt's article, "Bhikkhuni, Thilashin, Mae-chii: Women who Renounce the World in Burma, Thailand and the
Classical Pali Texts", in Crossroads, traces the development of religious women in Burma and Thailand and their position in society. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh's Thai Women in Buddhism, offers a further picture of Thai Buddhist women, including chapters devoted to the Thai Maeji and to the fledgeling bhikṣuṇī movement in Thailand.

Concerning Sri Lankan Buddhist women, three significant articles describe the contemporary situation for renunciate women. Elizabeth Nissan's "Recovering Practice: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka", appearing in South Asia Research, and Lowell W. Bloss's "The Female Renunciants of Sri Lanka: The Dasasilmattawa" in Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies both contribute to the field, while Tessa Bartholomeusz's chapter in Jose Cabézon's Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender also explores the history, tradition and living practice of Sri Lankan renunciants. She has recently published a book devoted to the subject, Women Under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka. Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere also include a chapter entitled "The Contemporary Resurgence of Nuns" in their study Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka.

There is an even smaller representation of Korean and Vietnamese monastic women in English, which has led me to include in this Survey Robert Buswell's The Zen Monastic Experience. Although it primarily concerns the lives and organisation of Korean monks and monasteries, much of the information may equally be applied to the bhikṣuṇī tradition for, in Korea as in China and Taiwan, many monasteries are mixed, and in any case, Vinaya rules and structure are applied across the board.
5. Female monastics in non-Buddhist religions

Patrick G. Henry and Donald K. Swearer's comparative study, *For the Sake of the World: The Spirit of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism*, is a significant exploration of the interrelationship of these two major monastic traditions. The authors examine the history, ideal, rules and viability of monasticism, drawing on the lives of exemplary male and female monastics of both traditions.

Since its first publication in 1977, Elizabeth A. Clark and Herbert Richardson's *Women and Religion* has remained an important and comprehensive sourcebook on the turbulent passage of women through Christian history, while Karen Jo Torjesen's *When Women Were Priests* presents a provocative analysis of the strong role of women in early Christianity and the gradual suppression of their leadership and power.

Patricia Ranft's *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe* documents the history of Christian women religious from early medieval to modern times, while Penelope D. Johnson's *Equal in Monastic Profession* describes the rules, daily life, monastic structure and administration in the thriving convents of medieval France. She concludes with a chapter examining the onset of decline for the convents and diminished status for nuns as the thirteenth century arrived. The preeminent situation of nuns in twelfth-century England is also described in Sharon K. Elkins' *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England*. Jo Ann Kay McNamara's 700-page opus, *Sisters In Arms*, documents the history of Catholic nuns through two millennia, and is described by her reviewers as an "epic drama" and "an inspiring chronicle of [nuns'] struggles".

Two interpretations of the Rule of St. Benedict are of particular relevance to the present
study. Both Seeking: A Paraphrase of the Rule of Saint Benedict with Commentary (Sister Mary Jane Romero, OSB) and Living the Rule Today (Sister Joan D. Chittister, OSB) present the sixth-century Rule in modern and highly germane language and it is clear that many principles kindred with Buddhist Vinaya flow through St. Benedict’s Rule.

6. Feminist Religious Analyses and Methodologies

Several studies contribute to the understanding of the complex, largely untapped area of women and nuns’ role in religious life, and in Buddhist life in particular. Although the present study incorporates a measure of feminist analysis, its aim is to present a personal and experiential account of female monastics in contemporary Buddhism, of how they view their own role in Buddhist monasticism and of how they interpret their precepts in a workable yet correct way. Detailed work is begging to be undertaken in this rich field by feminist scholars and theologians, and perhaps more importantly, by scholars who are themselves of religious inclination.

Rita Gross’s Buddhism After Patriarchy investigates the role of women in Buddhism, in both historical and contemporary times, and posits possible roles for Buddhist women in a future non-patriarchal Buddhism. She also provides feminist analysis of important Buddhist concepts and discovers a religion that does in its essence advocate equality of gender. Her essay, "Methodological Remarks on the Study of Women in Religion: Review, Criticism and Redefinition" (in Women and Religion edited by Judith Plaskow and Joan Arnold), reviews some of the methodological problems concerned with the study of women in religion and suggests constructive criticism and redefinition of various elements of existing methodologies.
One area which is attracting considerable interest among feminist scholars is that of the issue of egalitarianism in textual and sacred images as opposed to within everyday realities, that symbolic descriptions of the female fail to match the religious and social reality. *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, edited by Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles, contains essays concerning the functioning of sacred images of women in various religions and racial groups and the articulation of female symbolism within religion. The essay collection addresses many issues surrounding the conundrum of image and reality. One in particular, Anne C. Klein's "Primordial Purity and Everyday Life: Exalted Female Symbols and the Women of Tibet", is of particular relevance to the present study. She examines the social and religious status of Tibetan women and suggests constructive means for translating religion's quintessentially equal principles into social and practical equality. Diana Paul's "Portraits of the Feminine: Buddhist and Confucian Historical Perspectives", in *Studies in History of Buddhism* edited by A.K. Narain, also describes images of the female within two belief systems, Buddhism and Confucianism.

Janis D. Willis's "Nuns and Benefactresses: The Role of Women in the Development of Buddhism", in *Women, Religion and Social Change*, edited by Yvonne Y. Haddad and Ellison B. Findly, traces images of women, both nuns and lay benefactresses, in some significant Buddhist texts and discusses both the influence of Buddhism on women and their influence on and role in its development. Kajiyama Yuichi's "Women in Buddhism", in *The Eastern Buddhist*, also examines the portrayal and role of women in early Buddhism as does Alan Sponberg's "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism", in *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, edited by José Cabezon. Sponberg seeks to explain the often unsympathetic views of women in Buddhism by
examining the social dynamics of early Buddhism and the society and culture into which Buddhism penetrated.

Both Sponberg and Nancy Auer Falk in her article "The Case of the Vanishing Nuns: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism" (Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in non-Western Cultures) use the word 'ambivalent' to describe attitudes which caused significant damage to the monastic women of early Buddhism. Falk investigates some of the reasons for the disappearance of the nuns' order from the Indian subcontinent. Finally, Nancy Schuster Barnes in her chapter on Buddhism from Women in World Religions, edited by Arvind Sharma, traces the passage of women and attitudes to them through the development and rise of Buddhism in India, China and Tibet.

Two significant methodological texts contribute to understanding some particular problems associated with investigating the lives of religious women. The Cross-Cultural Study of Women, edited by Margot I. Duley and Mary I. Edwards examines the important issues of gender inequality and its origins, the myth or reality of male dominance, cross-cultural attitudes to the status of women and women within religious ideologies. Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History, edited by Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai, establishes guidelines for the field-worker in the areas of interview, analysis, interpretation, listening and observation, the ethics of research, responsibility and respect. I followed these guidelines, described in Section I.3 (Methodology), for the research that is reported in this study.

Throughout the study, footnotes highlight the contributions the above works make to the subject and the way in which they inform the study.
The Nuns' Order was founded by the Buddha in the sixth century BCE, a mere five years after the Order of Monks was established. With the acceptance of nuns into the Buddhist monastic system, the four-fold structure of Buddhist adherents was complete. Although details of the beginnings of the Nuns' Order vary within Vinaya texts of the various early Buddhist schools which emerged after the Mahāparinirvāṇa of the Buddha, basic accounts concur.

The account preserved within the Pāli Vinaya describes a large group of women led by the Buddha's foster-mother and aunt, Mahāprajāpatī, presenting themselves before the Buddha at Kapilavastu to request ordination into the monastic Order. His hesitation, 54

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50 It is not intended that this section be an exhaustive survey of Buddhist Vinaya, but rather a summary of relevant areas of Vinaya concerned with nuns and with the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya systems in particular. Others (A. Hirakawa, E. Frauwallner, W. Pachow, C. Prebisch, C. Kabilsingh) have provided more complete surveys or comparisons in their particular fields of interest.

51 Monks (bhikṣu), nuns (bhikṣunī) laymen (upāsaka) and laywomen (upāsikā).

52 By the time of the Third Council, which took place in Pātaliputra approximately 150 years after the passing away of the Buddha, at least eighteen schools had emerged which differed in their philosophical tenets and also in their practice of the Vinaya. (See Wilhelm Geiger's summary of the Buddhist Sects (The Mahāvasa, Ceylon Government Information Department, Colombo, 1960), pp. 276-287.) Although the scriptures of six Vinaya schools have been preserved, only three, the Dharmagupta (practised in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Korea), the Stūvīravāda/Pāli (practised in the Theravāda countries of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) and the Mūlasarvāstivāda (practised in the Tibetan Buddhism of Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Bhutan, Sikkim and India) are still active today. The other three, which are no longer practised but for which scriptures exist, are Mahāsaṅghika, Mahiśāsaka and Sarvāstivāda.


presumably based on the very real practical and social concerns of the time, aroused the women to even further efforts whereby they followed him to Vaiśālī and pleaded once again for admission into the Order. Ānanda, the attendant of the Buddha, interceded on behalf of the women, questioning the Buddha as to whether women were capable of realising the highest goals of Buddhist practice. The Buddha replied, “They are capable, Ānanda.”

As a result, the women were finally accepted as nuns dependent upon their agreeing to abide by eight rules, the Eight Chief Rules (Skt. gurudharma), for the duration of their lives as nuns. Having no choice, and determined to enter the Order, Mahāprajāpatī agreed to the imposition of these rules upon the women as a precondition. In this initial ordination of women, her acceptance also constituted the upasampadā ordination itself, as the precepts of a bhikṣunī had not yet been created. She then assumed the role of śīla-upādhyāyinī (preceptress in the rules) for the other five hundred Śakyan women who received admittance to the Order with her.

Although the creation of an Order of Buddhist Nuns had a precedent in the Śvetāmbara Jain Nuns’ Order, it must still be considered quite revolutionary that women could opt out of their designated role as daughters, wives, daughters-in-law and mothers and take upon themselves the life of a renunciant. The Eight Rules clearly relegated women to a secondary position within the monastic community, but they also made the idea of the

55 See Cullavagga, X, 1, 3.
56 ibid., X, 1,4-5. See Appendix 1 for a full list of the Eight Chief Rules.
female renunciant more acceptable to the society of the time. Five of them placed nuns in
dependence upon the Order of Monks for the observation of essential Vinaya rites, and
the other three demanded behavioural subordination. By agreeing to them,
Mahaprajapati thereby brought on herself and all nuns that have followed in her
footsteps up until the present day the dependence of nuns on monks in almost all
institutional matters of religious life and interaction.

As Nancy Falk has observed, although these special rules did not impede the nuns in their
pursuit of liberation, they had a subtle effect which was probably largely overlooked by
the nuns themselves. Their all-pervasive influence on monastic life and the extent to
which they prevented nuns from rising to preeminence, ensured that nuns could never
become great teachers except to other nuns.\textsuperscript{58} This inbuilt inferior status made it hard for
them to find economic support from the lay community, and was, in her view, a major
contributing factor in the virtual disappearance of bhikṣunīs from the greater part of the
Buddhist world.\textsuperscript{59}

Mahaprajapati subsequently requested the Buddha to rescind the first of the Rules, that
nuns, however long ordained, should bow and show the proper respect to any monk even
if only ordained for one day. The Buddha was unequivocal in his refusal to accede to her
request.\textsuperscript{60} Her protest remains a live issue and one which nuns in the twentieth century
are continuing to voice as they make valid proposals for change to a system which was

\textsuperscript{58} In his paper, "Bhikṣunīs in Indian Inscriptions", B.C. Law confirms this fact when he states that it
can be gleaned from epigraphical records that, although senior nuns had junior nuns as pupils, there were
no instances of monks being pupils under nuns (Epigraphia Indica, Vol. 25, pp. 31-34, 1939-40), p. 32.
\textsuperscript{60} Cullavagga, X, 3, 1. Although the Buddha refused to change the rule, he acquiesced to
Mahaprajapati's request to visit her as her death approached. By doing this, he in effect, changed the first
rule. See Murcott, The First Buddhist Women, p. 18.
the product of its age but parts of which, as they stand, have become outdated.

There are some scholars who believe that the imposition of the Eight Rules upon the nuns at ordination and, indeed, the reported reluctance of the Buddha to accept the women into the monastic Order at all, were later interpolations into the tradition, created by misogynistic monks at the time that the Vinaya was finally compiled and committed to writing. Diana Paul states that "the account is probably a monastic invention" as "there is some evidence that the myth-making process had intruded".61 Nancy Falk also ventures that "to the Buddha's credit, the story may be a fraud, for it does not belong to the oldest stratum of Buddhist literature".62 Bhikkhu Kantipalo points out that the sixth rule may have been established later as it stipulates that a novice having trained for two years as a probationer must ask for ūpāsampadā ordination from both Sāṃghas. As Mahāprajāpati was not required to do this and, in fact, there were not yet two Sāṃghas, Khantipalo suggests that all "the Gurudharmas have been backdated to Mahāprajāpati's ordination by some bhikkhus who were in charge of reciting the Vinaya."63 Furthermore, Akira Hirakawa, a leading Vinaya scholar, states that "their contents indicate that they were actually formulated later."64 One very clear indication that the Eight Rules may be a later interpolation is that all the Rules, excepting rules three and five, have identical or almost identical counterparts among the bhikṣuṇī Pāyantika-Dharmas. There would have been no purpose to include in the Pāyantika-Dharmas these precepts, the majority of which already existed in another place (the Eight Rules), except in order to

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highlight their discriminatory purpose and stress the subordination of nuns to monks, and the Buddha himself would not have entertained such a motivation.65

Later on, after the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha was well established, the prerequisites for ordination and the ordination ceremony itself became more elaborate and involved the training of novices as probationers (śīkṣamāṇā) for two years prior to ordination,66 and the appointment of a qualified bhikṣuṇī instructor (upādhyāyini) to train the candidates for two years. Their presentation, questioning and ordination before the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha, and finally a duplicate conferral of ordination by the Bhikṣu Saṅgha on the same day was also required. For an ordination to be considered valid, all these above elements should be included.67 The ordination ceremony will be explained in more detail in Section II.2 within the context of the Chinese bhikṣuṇī tradition.

65 In Young Chung states in her MA thesis, “A Buddhist View of Women: A Comparative Study of the Rules for Bhikṣuṇīs and Bhikṣus based on the Chinese Pratimokṣa” (Berkeley, Ca., 1995), “the Eight Rules reveal irreconcilability with the story of the founding of the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and the penalty for violation of rules in the Bhikṣuṇī Pāyantika-Dharmas.” Firstly, accepting for life the Eight Rules was an essential prerequisite for receiving ordination as a bhikṣuṇī, and yet the penalty for violation of a Pāyantika-Dharma is simple repentance before one bhikṣuṇī. Secondly, four of the Eight Rules mention matters whose implementation would not have been possible at the time of the Buddha’s ordination of Mahāprajāpatī, for there was no Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha and no two-year śīkṣamāṇā training in place at that time. (p. 92) See Appendix 1 for a complete table which illustrates the comparisons.

66 The institution of ‘probationer’ has no counterpart for males. This is probably due to the explanation that a woman would have time to ensure that she was not unknowingly pregnant. The number and content of the śīkṣamāṇā precepts for intending female entrants do not agree in the various extant Vinaya systems. The Mūlasarvāstivāda lists twelve whereas the Dharmagupta contains only six, the first five śīlas and abstention from eating at the wrong time. The Pāli Vinaya concurs with the Dharmagupta. Hirakawa (op. cit., p. 53, fn. 17) believes that these latter two are probably the oldest.

67 See Kathryn A. Tsai, Lives of the Nuns (Hawaii University Press, Honolulu, 1994). In biography No. 34, that of Pao-hsien, it is recounted that Gunavarman, the central Asian missionary monk who arrived in China in 429 CE (d. 431), being questioned by the nun Hui-kuo about the validity of single platform bhikṣuṇī ordination, replied that, as there was not initially an Assembly of Nuns, the first bhikṣuṇīs had received their ordination only from the Assembly of Monks. It is important to note that he did not consider this ordination to be invalid, but that the dual ordination subsequently bestowed on the nuns was “augmenting the good value of the obligation that had already been received.” (p. 63). Chinese abbesses and abbots to whom I have personally spoken on this matter also agree that single platform ordinations are valid, however, they emphasise the value and blessing of the dual ordination. All sources agree, however, that an ordination conferred only by the Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha is invalid.
The bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage was transmitted from India to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE when King Aśoka's daughter, Saṅghamittā Therī, and a group of Indian bhikṣuṇīs was summoned to bestow ordination upon Queen Anula and a large number of Sri Lankan women. Although there appear to be no recorded references to bhikṣuṇīs in India after the ninth century CE, the Bhikṣuṇī Samgha continued to flourish in Sri Lanka until about the late tenth or early eleventh centuries CE.

It was during the fifth century CE that the complete ordination lineage was firmly established in China, although the first Chinese nun is recorded as receiving novice ordination in 317 CE and, along with three other women, a single platform bhikṣuṇī ordination in 357, as mentioned above. Almost 100 years later two groups of Sinhalese bhikṣuṇīs came to China. The first group, which arrived in 429, questioned the validity of the Chinese bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage. There were not enough of them, however, to provide the quorum of ten necessary to grant dual ordination. Five years later in 433, a second group led by the bhikṣuṇī Tessara arrived and, with the Indian monk, Saṃghavarman, performed re-ordination to over 300 nuns at Nan-lin Monastery in

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68 Nancy Auer Falk, “The Case of the Vanishing Nuns”, p. 222. B.C. Law (op. cit., pp. 33-34), however, names the eighth century CE as bearing the last mention in inscriptions of bhikṣuṇīs in India.


70 Ching-chien, regarded as the first bhikṣuṇī in China, received novice vows at this time along with 24 other women. She then established the first recorded convent in China, Chu-lin Convent, near the West Gate of the imperial city of Loyang, and in the absence of a monk instructor, acted as the instructor-nun of the other new novices (see Lily Hsiao Hung Lee, "The Emergence of Buddhist Nuns in China and its Social Ramifications", Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia, Vols. 18 and 19: 82-100, 1986-7, p. 88).

71 An ordination given to bhikṣuṇī candidates by a single Bhikṣu Samgha consisting of ten members.
Nanking in 434.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage was established in China.

Although the ordination was performed in accordance with a now-lost Mahāsāṃghika (Ch. \textit{Mo-ho-seng-shih}) Bhikṣuṇī Rules and Rites text,\textsuperscript{73} the Sinhalese nuns would have held a Sthaviravāda ordination lineage. This may well be the first instance of monastics installing the ordination lineage in a foreign country possessing a different ordination lineage, and could possibly set a precedent for the establishment or re-establishment of bhikṣuṇī ordination in countries where it has been lost or never existed.\textsuperscript{74} Furthermore, during the reign of Emperor Hsiao-wu (373-396) of the Wei Dynasty, the Dharma Master Fa Ts'ung had begun to propagate the Dharmagupta Vinaya (\textit{Ssu-fen-lü}). By the advent of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907), this Vinaya tradition became widely established and even surpassed all other versions which had previously been circulating in China. In


\textsuperscript{73} See Shih Pao-ch'ang's \textit{Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan} (Lives of the Nuns). In the first biography, that of Ching-chien, it is documented that a Chinese monk, Seng-chien, while in central Asia, obtained a nuns' rites and rules book according to the Mahāsāṃghika sect. After it was translated in Loyang in 357 CE, Ching-chien and three other women received the bhikṣuṇī ordination from the Assembly of Monks only. It was not until 434, following the arrival in China of Sinhalese bhikṣuṇīs in 429 and again in 433 that the first group of over 300 nuns received re-ordination. See also biography No. 1 (Ching-chien), biography No. 14 (Hui-kuo), biography No. 27 (Seng-kuo) and biography No. 34 (Pao-hsien) of Tsai's \textit{Lives of the Nuns}. She has included much additional material in some of the biographies to clarify important points, particularly regarding the introduction of the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage into China.

\textsuperscript{74} In the ninth century Chinese bhikṣus presumably of the Dharmagupta lineage were used to help reinstate the Tibetan bhikṣu lineage after its virtual eradication by the anti-religious king, Langdarma. In the eleventh century, the bhikṣu lineage in Sri Lanka was restored by Thai or Burmese bhikṣus. It is a sad fact that, although there existed the possibility, Burmese bhikṣuṇīs were not also called upon to restore the bhikṣuṇī lineage to Sri Lanka. In addition, Chinese bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs have not been called upon to restore the bhikṣuṇī ordination tradition to Burma or Sri Lanka, even though China originally received the bhikṣuṇī ordination tradition from Sri Lanka. It is worth noting that there is increasing interest among some Burmese \textit{thilashin} in the possibility of full ordination. Furthermore, as mentioned above, in December 1996, a group of Korean bhikṣus of the Chogyo Order ordained ten Sri Lankan women as bhikṣuṇīs in India, signalling the first tangible signs that the bhikṣuṇī order may again flourish in that country. For a thorough discussion of the ancient order of nuns in Sri Lanka and recent efforts to revive it, see Tessa Bartholomeusz, \textit{Women Under the Bō Tree}. 
this way the Vinaya lineage changed again.

The Dharmagupta Vinaya was originally formulated by the Venerable Dharmagupta in the third century BCE in four successive compilations, hence its alternative name, Vinaya of the Four Divisions. Occupying sixty scrolls, it was translated into Chinese by Kashmiri Tripitaka Master Buddhayaśas in collaboration with Dharma Master Chu Fo-nien in Ch’ang-an between the years 408-412 CE. The first section consists of the Vinayavidhaṅga, a commentary on the prohibitions laid down by the Buddha and including the Pratimokṣa Sūtra, within which the Bhikṣuṇī Vinayavidhaṅga follows after the Bhikṣu Vinayavidhaṅga. The second section, the Skandhaka or Vinayavastu, contains the twenty bases or vastus (Ch. chien-tu) which explain the prescriptions and permissions designated by the Buddha. The Dharmagupta Bhikṣuṇī Pratimokṣa lists, in decreasing order of gravity, the six categories of rules found in all extant Vinaya schools, and the final group of seven rules concerning legal matters (Skt. Adhikaranaśamathadharma); the number of precepts is 348 altogether.

As the early Saṃgha communities developed, numbers increased and the original eremitical lifestyle gradually transformed into a cenobitical one, the need for further guidelines arose. So, the full sets of bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī precepts found in the different

75 Dharmagupta may be identified with the Yonaka missionary, Dharmarakkhita, of the time of the Ashoka Buddhist missions, who was sent to the north-west regions (the Iranian frontier). As Dr. Nalinaksha Dutt observes in “The Buddhist Sects: A Survey”, B.C. Law Volume, Part I (Indian Research Institute, Calcutta, 1945), pp. 282-292, the Sogdians and Parthians also took an interest in this Vinaya system (p. 287). There is also evidence that they translated it into Chinese. See E. Frauwallner, The Earliest Vinaya (Serie Orientale, Roma VIII, 1956), p. 20. Frauwallner ventures that the Dharmagupta Vinaya may have spread to China from these regions.

76 Defeats (Pārājika), Remainders (Saṁghāvasēga), Downfalls involving forfeiture (Naibṣargika-Pāyantika), Downfalls (Pāyantika), Individual Confessions (Pratidesanīya), Faults (Śaikṣa). The Bhikṣu Precepts also consist of these six categories, but include an additional category, Aniyata (undetermined), which contains two precepts.
Vinaya schools slowly evolved into their present form, however their number and content differ slightly within the various Vinaya schools.\(^7\)

It appears clear from textual evidence that the major precepts, particularly those in the first category of *Pārājika*, and many of those in the categories immediately following, were formulated at the time of the Buddha, however, as Dutt states, "the same cannot be claimed for the minor or lesser ones."\(^7\) Pachow, however, believes that the original Prātimokṣa was not classified in the way it is today and that it would be a mistake to assume that the first sections were formulated at an earlier date than the later sections. He states that the *Śaikṣa-Dharmas* which constitute the last section of precepts, are among the oldest rules of the Prātimokṣa and that the later classification into sections was based on the degree and nature of the offence rather than on chronology.\(^7\)

The transmission of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya tradition for nuns in Tibet has been rather different from the Dharmagupta bhikṣu lineage transmission in China. Even though there has never existed a recognised bhikṣu tradition in Tibet, in the absence of such bhikṣus, Tibetan bhikṣus transmit 10 novice precepts to women. Because the Vinaya states that bhikṣunīs and not bhikṣus should bestow novice ordination on women, those bhikṣus do incur a minor fault in performing the novice precept ceremony for nuns.


The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya has survived in its entirety only in Tibetan, although there exist fragments in Sanskrit and Chinese. It occupies thirteen volumes of the Tibetan Kangyur (bKa’-gyur), the Buddha's words, and eighteen volumes of the Tangyur (bsTan-’gyur), treatises. The thirteen Kangyur volumes of which the ninth volume concerns bhikṣūṇīs, were translated into Tibetan at the end of the eighth or beginning of the ninth centuries CE by a number of Indian and Tibetan translators, and contain four sections, Vinaya-āgamas (T. 'Dul-ba lung-sde bshi). The complete Bhikṣu Prātimokṣa Sūtra (T. dGe-slong-ma'i so-sor thar-pa'i mdo) and Bhikṣu Vinayavibhaṅga (T. dGe-slong-ma'i 'dul-ba mam-par 'byed-pa) occur within its second section, the Vinayavibhaṅgha (T. 'Dul-ba mam-pa byed-pa), after the Bhikṣu Prātimokṣa Sūtra and Bhikṣu Vinayavibhaṅga. The first section, the Vinayavastu (T. 'Dul-ba gshi), contains seventeen vastus. This reversal of the order of the two sections is unique to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. The Vinayakṣudrakavastu (T. 'Dul-ba phran-tshegs kyi gshi) (section for minor Vinaya matters) and Vinayottaragrantha (T. 'Dul-ba gshung bla-ma'm dam-pa) (The Excellent Vinaya Text) comprise the third and fourth sections, respectively.

The Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa Sūtra of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya contains 364 precepts compared with 341 in the Dharmagupta Vinaya, which are also divided into six categories according to the gravity of the offence. At the end of the list there is the category of seven Rules for the deciding of legal questions (Adhikaraṇaśamatha-Dharma).

As mentioned above, generally speaking, the variations are principally due to certain

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80 Volumes five to nine were translated by Jina-Mitra, a great Mūlasarvāstivāda Master and Vaibhāṣika teacher of Kashmir, and the Tibetan translator, Lui Gyaltsen (Klu'i rGyal-mtshan).
81 The number of precepts for bhikṣus, including Adhikaraṇaśamatha-Dharmas, is 262 in the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda and 250 in the Chinese Dharmagupta.
precepts being subdivided or condensed, so that between these two Vinaya schools the differences are slight. In the first category of Parājika, which entails immediate expulsion from the Order, the eight precepts are identical. In each of the following five categories, there are no more than three extra precepts for the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, except the Saikṣa-Dharmas where there are twelve more, although the content of the precepts does vary between the schools. The Adhikaraṇaśamatha-Dharmas are also identical.82

Current moves by nuns of several Buddhist traditions to raise their status and bring them into line with the standing of monks in general aim for privilege and recognition to be based on merit rather than gender, and for outdated, outmoded and gender-biased prohibitions to be re-evaluated and modified. Along with these objectives and with increasing efforts to make education and opportunity freely and impartially available, an active and expanding movement has emerged, originating primarily with Western Buddhist nuns and being taken up by nuns of other Buddhist traditions, to instate the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage in those traditions which presently lack it.83

It is not difficult to understand why the brahmanic view of women as subordinate to men

82 Rather than list the content of these categories of precepts, I refer the reader to Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, A Comparative Study of Bhikkhuni-Pātimokkha, (Chaukhambha Orientalia, Varanasi, 1984).

83 There have been periods of decline in all the Buddhist traditions during which the monastic lineages were either broken or severely damaged. However, the monks always managed to restore their ordination lineage using monks from other countries to make up the numbers. But in some Theravāda countries where there was originally a bhikṣuṇī tradition, such as Sri Lanka and Burma, this never happened and the lineage has long died out although the Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya texts still exist. At this point, the only countries where bhikṣuṇīs remain are those following Mahāyāna Buddhism (Korea, China and Vietnam). According to Gombrich and Obeyesekere (op. cit., p. 274), although it is technically legitimate to transport a valid bhikṣuṇī ordination tradition between the two vehicles because the Vinaya is observed by monastics of all Buddhist traditions, most Theravādin Elders would not accept such a move and so no Theravāda Buddhist country has a Bhikṣuṇī Samgha recognised by their Patriarchs or Elders, although a small number of Thai and Sri Lankan women have individually received bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Chinese tradition.
which prevailed in ancient India influenced the early monkhood. In some twentieth-century Buddhist societies, however, there continues to be widespread opposition and even hostility to the moves by women to upgrade the nuns' tradition. At the very best, there is ignorance and ambivalence; it is not and has never been an issue for monks. 84 Clearly, sectarianism, prejudice and the fear of nuns acquiring any power or any share in the traditional support of the laity are hindering its progress, 85 for there is no technical reason why the Chinese bhikṣuṇī tradition cannot be reintroduced into Sri Lanka and Burma and installed for the first time in Thailand.

As for the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the two lineages of Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmagupta are currently being examined for compatibility of origin and content, 86 and the purity and continuity of the Dharmagupta Vinaya lineage is being investigated to ascertain the possibility of its introduction into the Tibetan tradition for the purposes of bhikṣuṇī ordination. 87 The Dalai Lama corroborates this situation:

Now, with regard to the Chinese Bhikshuni lineage, once it becomes clear that the lineage is intact then I think we can easily introduce it among Tibetans. But the lineage must come from the Buddha himself, the historical Buddha... 88.

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85 Bhikṣuṇī Lekshe Tsomo writes that "Some opponents have charged that efforts to revive the Bhikṣuṇī Sangha are equivalent to the heinous crime of creating a schism in the Sangha...[I]t is clearly those who oppose such a revival who are actually responsible for creating dissention...Furthermore...it is specified that only a fully ordained monk is capable of creating such a schism." See Sakyadhītā: Daughters of the Buddha, p. 218.
86 Both the Mūlasarvāstivāda and Dharmagupta schools are considered to be offshoots of the Theravāda (Sthavira) school, and therefore closely related. See Hirakawa Akira, A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna (Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1993), p. 113.
87 See Appendix 3, The Contested History of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination in Tibet, for a summary of recent developments concerning efforts to extend full ordination to nuns of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.
88 Cho Yang, Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture, No. 6, 1994, p. 133.
It is a mandatory requirement for the valid transmission of the ordination lineage that unbroken continuity from the Buddha must as far as possible be proven, although it is quite unreasonable to expect conclusive proof of the purity of any lineage that originated more than 2,500 years ago. Furthermore, as Bhikṣuṇī Karma Lekshe Tsomo rightly states, "the onus of proving that the lineage has not been transmitted continuously clearly falls upon the challenger. Why should those with faith in the purity of the lineage they hold feel any compulsion to validate it?"89

There is another side to this question and one which begs consideration. To question the validity of an ordination lineage to which tens of thousands of monks and nuns belong is insensitive to say the least. The Chinese monks and nuns do not see the necessity to examine the purity of their lineage, and their very act of receiving ordination indicates their faith in and acceptance of the Dharmagupta Vinaya tradition. I am aware of two instances of Tibetan monks personally questioning Chinese monastics about their lineage's validity and in both cases offence was taken at the manner in which the question was presented. At a religious conference held in Dharamsala recently, the spectrum of views which emerged when this issue was raised ranged from the ignorance and persistent conservatism of the majority of monks to the broad and educated comments of a very few. This only serves to accentuate the confusion, misinformation and lack of unity with which the Tibetan hierarchy has been approaching this very important issue to date.90

The Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese bhikṣuṇīs do not doubt the continuity of their

ordination tradition and furthermore, they are more concerned with the continued moral
rectitude of the ordaining masters and with their own ethical behaviour than with the
unbroken transmission of precepts from one generation to the next. If the same criteria
which are being used to examine the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage were applied to the
bhikṣu lineage, then it is certain that flaws and irregularities in procedure would be found.
Would the bhikṣu lineage then be brought under scrutiny or declared void? Not applying
the same standards to both lineages is clearly discriminatory.

In any case, in her *Brief Survey of the Vinaya*, Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen describes a
personal interview with Zürcher. 91 She quotes his opinion:

there are no indications in Chinese history...which would lead one to doubt that the
Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha has not existed continually until today...Throughout the whole of
Chinese history nuns and nunneries are mentioned here and there in different contexts.
Although there are accounts of several wars and battles...there is no mention of the
Bhikṣu or Bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha being completely or nearly extirpated... 92

Lekshe Tsomo also states that, "Thus far, no one has been able to produce evidence of
any break in the existing bhikṣuṇī lineages." 93 This conclusion also concurs with
personal interviews which I have conducted with Vinaya scholars in Taiwan and
China. 94 The venerable and knowledgeable Bhikṣuṇī Lung-lien from Chengtu in

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94 Here reference is being made to the valid lineage of authority to bestow bhikṣuṇī ordination being
continually passed from bhikṣu to bhikṣu since the Buddha's time. In other words, the bhikṣu lineage
itself is not in question. There is no doubt that the tradition of dual ordination is broken, for even in
Taiwan today, despite overwhelming numbers of bhikṣuṇīs, a dual ordination ceremony is rarely
transmitted. Bhikṣuṇī Heng-ching states that according to the Eight Chief Rules a dual ordination
ceremony is essential, so omitting it already contraveneś these Rules, however, it was the chauvinist
biases in the past which considered dual ordination unimportant that led to its demise. Today it is a
cultural problem and an attitude of complacency which perpetuates its continued omission. She believes
(continued on page 62)
Venerable Lung-lien Fa-shih (left), Abbess of Ai-tao T'ang, Chengtu, Szechuan, and Director of Szechwan Bhiksuni Institute. Beside her is her chosen successor.

Bhiksuni disciples of Lung-lien Fa-shih studying at Szechwan Bhiksuni Institute.
Szechwan Province, China, summed up this question very succinctly when she told me that whether one is technically a bhikṣuṇī or not is determined by one’s ordination from a quorum of bhikṣus. However receiving in addition the ordination from bhikṣuṇīs completes procedure correctly and enables the novice nun to follow a bhikṣuṇī teacher for the prescribed two years prior to full ordination. Bhikṣuṇī Lung-lien also stated emphatically that, according to her knowledge, history does not record a break in the ordination lineage although there have been disasters and many instances of prejudice.\(^{95}\)

In early 1997, the Dalai Lama visited Taiwan for the first time. During his visit, I and another Australian bhikṣuṇī, Tenzin Daö, arranged a meeting for him with five senior Taiwanese bhikṣuṇīs so that he could put his queries about the Dharmagupta bhikṣuṇī lineage to them. Despite his expressing a wish for Tibetan nuns to have the chance for full ordination, questions about its introduction similar to ones raised on many previous occasions were put once again. His Holiness reiterated: "If bhikṣuṇī precepts are to be established, there must be a document or a sūtra to prove that the lineage is clear and unbroken."\(^{96}\)

Six months later, Geshe Tashi Tsering was sent by the Dalai Lama to Taiwan, and again we attended the meetings. The Taiwanese bhikṣuṇīs were well prepared with textual

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\(^{95}\) Personal interview with Bhikṣuṇī Lung-lien, Ai-tao T'ang, Chengtu, China, September 1995.

references and relevant material to present to the Geshe. He spent seventeen days in Taiwan, painstakingly sifting through Vinaya texts with the help of translators, meeting scholars and abbesses and viewing a bhikṣuṇī ordination in progress. The large quantity of material he gathered was presented to the Dalai Lama for consideration by Tibetan Vinaya scholars, along with a report, written by Bhikṣuṇī Tenzin Daö and myself, requested by Geshe Tashi Tsering as a result of the meetings.97

In August 1998, Taiwanese scholars were invited to Dharamsala, India, to discuss the same issues with Tibetan and Theravādin elders. In their papers, several Taiwanese and Sri Lankan scholars expressed surprise at the repetitious nature of the questions, for it is clearly obvious to them that the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage is fit to be transmitted. No doubt the Dharmagupta bhikṣuṇī ordination tradition will have to face further scrutiny before it is finally accepted, but in its long history it has certainly faced considerably tougher trials than this one, and Taiwanese monastics are already confident about the outcome.

The living tradition of Vinaya has survived the vicissitudes of turbulent and at times brutal history, and the innovations of the modern world to continue nourishing generations of bhikṣuṇīs and bhikṣus into the twentieth century. It must now prove its flexibility and resilience once again as it encounters new socio-cultural situations and as the quest to establish bhikṣuṇī ordination where it is presently unavailable gathers momentum. One indicator of its adaptability and endurance is to observe how rules formulated more than 2,500 years ago in ancient India are being re-evaluated and successfully applied today in the nunnery situations described in this work.

SECTION II

CHINESE BHIKSUNIS: PILLARS OF CHINESE BUDDHISM

1 BUDDHISM, NUNS AND NUNNERIES IN TAIWAN: AN OVERVIEW

Before 1895, when Taiwan was forced to become a colony of Japan, polytheistic and folk elements had already long been incorporated into Buddhism, which had originally been introduced to the island from mainland China at the end of the Ming dynasty. Understanding and practice of Buddhism in Taiwan were therefore different in some respects from mainland Chinese Buddhist ways. A prominent Buddhist cult of the time which displayed these trends was the Vegetarian Cult (chai chiao). Although its adherents worshipped Kuan-yin, the Chinese Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion, and followed a strictly vegetarian diet, they also included other non-Buddhist deities such as Matsu, goddess of the sea, in their pantheon. The clergy were not celibate, but took on the role of married priests.

Furthermore, although famous and erudite monks, primarily from Fukien and Chekiang provinces of China, had again begun propagating mainland Buddhism in Taiwan during the Ch'ing dynasty, after 1895 Buddhism in Taiwan was also largely influenced by Japanese Buddhism, which no longer placed a strong emphasis on monastic ordination. Male practitioners in particular chose for the most part to lead religious lives without

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1 See Shih Jien-shen, "A Review and Suggestions for Buddhist Monastic Education Program Development in Taiwan" (M.S. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1992), pp. 79-81, for a description of the situation of Taiwanese Buddhism during the Japanese occupation which came about as a result of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed in April 1895.

2 Interview with Li Yü-chen, Buddhist scholar, Academia Sinica, Taipei, October 1997.
completely renouncing their families. In the absence of a strict Vinaya code in Japanese Buddhism, there was little adequate monastic education and as a result Taiwanese men and women wishing to pursue religious lives very often did not see the importance of receiving ordination. The majority of religious women at that time, therefore, simply joined a temple but still chose to follow a celibate lifestyle characterised by piety and daily devotions to the Buddha, rather like their Japanese counterparts. Unable to travel to China for Chinese Buddhist ordination and monastic training during the Japanese occupation, Taiwanese men were also discouraged by Japanese Buddhist attitudes from becoming monks. Although the Japanese never coerced the Taiwanese to follow their traditions and in fact cooperated with them, their missionaries and teachings were influential, and it is therefore interesting to note that Buddhist women inclined towards monasticism still chose celibacy while the majority of men opted for marriage.

After 1945, however, a few Taiwanese monastics began becoming active in Buddhist education, and in 1948 Tz‘ü-hang (d. 1954), a pioneer of monastic education, came from China and established two Buddhist seminaries in Taiwan. He was a prominent student of T’ai-hsü (1890-1947), the controversial Buddhist monastic education reformer, who

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3 In “Zen Nuns: Living Treasures of Japanese Buddhism”, Paula Arai traces the monastic history of Buddhism in Japan, describing the ordination of the first three Japanese women as bhikṣuṇis in Paekche, Korea in 590 CE (p. 64) and the official establishment of the male order in 753 CE (p. 74). In 1872, the Meiji government issued a regulation which permitted monks to eat meat, wear lay clothing, grow their hair and marry (p. 107). Although officially there had been no order of ordained nuns in Japan, women living as nuns were also permitted one year later (1873) to eat meat, grow their hair and marry, however most renunciate women chose to maintain the traditional monastic regulations and remain celibate.

4 In the autobiographical account of his life in China, In Search of the Dharma (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1992), pp. 79-83, Chen-hua quotes the Master Tao-yüan’s description of the origin of the movement for married priests in Japanese Buddhism and how it influenced Taiwanese monks before 1949 (pp. 256-7). This attitude to ordination is still common, and along with compulsory national service for males, contributes to the much lower ratio of monks to nuns in contemporary Taiwan. See also Shih Jien-shen’s “A Review and Suggestions for Buddhist Monastic Education Program Development in Taiwan”, for a description of Japanese Buddhism’s influence on Taiwanese Buddhism.
had established, among others, the prestigious Wu-ch’ang Seminary in China in 1922.\textsuperscript{5}

A new movement towards the institutionalisation of Buddhist monastic education had begun in China very early in the twentieth century to meet the demands of rapidly changing political and societal situations in which Buddhism found itself. Holmes Welch states that he easily collected the names of over seventy such seminaries operating before the Communist victory of 1949, which, "no less than other Buddhist organisations in the Republican period, came and went like bubbles in a ferment".\textsuperscript{6} From 1949, when the Communist Party proclaimed the People’s Republic of China and large numbers of defeated Nationalists fled to Taiwan, many more Chinese masters came from mainland China bringing with them a strong tradition of Buddhist monasticism, education and practice. Several of them were also students of T’ai-hsiü.\textsuperscript{7}

Although ordination platforms had been sporadically performed in Taiwan before 1949, they were not strictly administered and usually only lasted for one week. The newly-arrived Buddhist masters began to hold annual ordination platforms which largely conformed to the standards upheld in such important mainland Chinese ordination monasteries as Hui-chü Ssu (whose name reverted to Lung-ch’ang Ssu in 1931) on Pao-

\textsuperscript{5} See Tzung Ming Cheng, “Venerable T’ai-hsiü and Modern Chinese Monastic Education” (M.Ed. thesis, University of Washington, 1990). Pages 32-45 describe significant activities and reforms which T’ai-hsiü undertook, including the establishment of Buddhist seminaries. See also Holmes Welch, \textit{The Buddhist Revival in China} (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1968) for a discussion of T’ai-hsiü’s radical ideas and activities, some of which earned him outspoken criticism in some quarters, as well as limited support in others.


\textsuperscript{7} Some of these students, who became reformers in their own right, include Ta-hsing Fa-Shih and Yin-shun Fa-shih.
hua Mountain in Kiangsu Province or Pao-kuang Ssu in Szechwan Province. Instead of lasting barely a week, they were extended to one month and contained most of the traditional elements of monastic training and ordination. Since 1983, two 53-day ordinations have been held, conforming in almost every detail to traditional ordinations in China, and in 1998 a 60-day dual ordination was held at Kuang-te Ssu near Tainan city.

The newly-arrived masters also actively initiated programs of Buddhist propagation through lectures, the publishing of Buddhist magazines and the printing of books and texts including the entire Tripitaka. Following the trend begun on mainland China, they established Buddhist colleges and institutes, some of which continue today, and along with more recently established institutes, are almost the only places offering a comprehensive Buddhist education. Since 1960, Buddhist clubs, societies and groups, many of which are affiliated to universities and colleges, have also sprung up and are already producing significant numbers of aspiring monastics. Several of the nuns I interviewed at Hsiang-kuang Ssu became interested in Buddhism through university Buddhist clubs.

There are a number of well-known abbots who have been at the forefront of Buddhist education in Taiwan. Notable among them are Yin-shun Fa-shih (b.1906), who founded the Fu-yen Seminary, and Pai-sheng Fa-shih (1904-1987), whose institute is called San-tsang Institute. Wu-yin Fa-shih, Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Ssu, is herself a former student from San-tsang Institute and has said:


9 In "A Review and Suggestions for Buddhist Monastic Education Program in Taiwan", Jien-shen Fa-shih lists fourteen institutes and seminaries which had been established in Taiwan in the 1950s (p. 87).
Master Pai-sheng strongly emphasised the moral training of monastics. The purpose of his founding the institute was to reform and eliminate the corrupt life of Japanese Buddhism and guide Taiwanese monastics to live a right and regular life. His teachings about the concepts of Sangha, observance, and educating monastics had strongly influenced me and other classmates. ... because he gave equal opportunities for monks and nuns to study in his institute, the position of nuns was substantially raised which influenced the following development of female monastics and their contribution to Taiwan's Buddhism.10

Pai-sheng was also the main initiator of the reformed ordination platforms in Taiwan, introducing the first such ceremony in 1952, and thereby establishing a strong foundation for the advancement of monastic discipline in Taiwan. Building on that foundation, Buddhist education has also developed, and many more institutes have been established in recent years with such masters as Ching-hsin Fa-shih, Hsing-yün Fa-shih and Sheng-yen Fa-shih coordinating co-educational temple institutes11 and Hsiao-yün Fa-shih12 and Wu-yün Fa-shih heading nuns’ institutes. Jien-shen Fa-shih lists 37 Buddhist institutes operating in Taiwan in 1992.13

Buddhism in Taiwan has flourished in recent years. Many large Buddhist events and social gatherings take place annually. Because Buddhist temples in Taiwan do not attract government support, lay sponsorship of monastic endeavours is among the most generous in the Buddhist world. Considerable amounts of money are donated to temples, gifts are made to Sangha members and lavish ceremonies are held. In October 1995, I

10 ibid., pp. 86-7.
11 Ching-hsin Fa-shih’s temple, Kuang-te Ssu, is located in the north of Kaohsiung province. Hsing-yün Fa-shih is the founder of the large and well-known Fo-kuang Shan, located close to Kaohsiung city. Both these temples have affiliated institutes or colleges. Sheng-yen Fa-shih is the director of Chung-hua Fo-hsüeh yen-chia-so in Taipei’s northern suburbs and of the nearby Nung-ch’an Ssu and Dhanna Drum Mountain (Fa-ku Shan).
12 Hsiao-yün’s bhikṣuṇī institute, Lotus Buddhist Ashram and its associated Buddhist graduate college, Sino-Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies, are located in the mountains to the east of Taipei city.
13 Shih Jien-shen, op. cit., pp.98-9. None of these institutes is recognised by the Taiwanese government, despite the high standard and credibility of some of them. See note 28 for further explanation.
attended an impressive gathering to raise money for the newly initiated Hsüan-tsang College (Hsüan-tsang jen-wen she-hui hsüeh-yüan), a brain-child of the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China.\textsuperscript{14} Monks and nuns wore begging bowls around their necks and walked in lines through the crowded park while bills and small coins were thrust into the bowls from all directions. I was also given a bowl to wear and was astounded at the amount of money given to me for the new university in a very short time. The enthusiasm and generosity with which the crowds made donations was impressive.

Such large-scale events are held frequently throughout the year. Temples vie with each other to host the annual ordination platform, a spinoff of which is the generation of income and prestige, both for the temple and the ordaining abbots.\textsuperscript{15} For its duration, lay people daily make offerings of books, rosaries, medicine, clothes, daily requisites and money to the ordinees as well as volunteering their services to facilitate the smooth running of such a large and complex event. Every year, the Kathina ceremony of robe offering is organised,\textsuperscript{16} and although it conforms to Vinaya regulations, it and other traditional ceremonies sometimes become a platform for some abbots to further their

\textsuperscript{14} See note 28 for a description of its stormy passage to final inauguration.

\textsuperscript{15} Since its formation in 1945 and up until the passage of the “Revised Law on the Organisation of Civic Groups” in 1989, the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China was the only recognised nationwide group of Buddhists in Taiwan. With the decentralisation of the representation of Buddhism has come, among other things, the freedom for other temples to offer an annual ordination platform in addition to that organised annually by the Buddhist Association. See Charles B. Jones, “Relations between the Nationalist Government and the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC) since 1945”, \textit{Journal of Chinese Religions}, No. 24: 77-99, Fall, 1996, for a clear description of the role of the BAROC in Taiwan, its handling of certain conflicts between Taiwanese Buddhism and politics and attitudes to its operations.

\textsuperscript{16} This Vinaya rite takes place after the \textit{varṣā} and its subsequent \textit{pravāraṇā} and consists of the highly meritorious act of the lay community donating robes or cloth for the making of one robe (which can be either a \textit{sāṅghāti}, \textit{uttarāsanga} or \textit{antaravāsaka}) for each Sāṅgha member. It is quite a complex rite within the Vinaya observances ordered by the Buddha. For more information on this rite, see Heinz Bechert, “Some Remarks on the Kaṭhina Rite”, \textit{Journal of Bihar Research Society}, Vol. LIV, Parts I-IV: 319-329, Jan/Dec. 1968.
personal ambitions, or for politicians to attract political popularity by demonstrating their support for Buddhism.

It is clear, according to Heng-ching Fa-shih, a senior bhikṣuṇī and a professor in the Department of Philosophy at Taiwan National University, that therein lies the crisis of Buddhism in Taiwan: that although it is flourishing, a lack of equilibrium has emerged. If there were a criticism of the direction which Buddhism is taking in Taiwan it would be that some of the reasons for its prosperity are not necessarily sound. It was said to me that there is excessive wealth and reputation, that there are too many temples and too many projects and activities and that some people are losing sight of the essence of practice in favour of superficial and elaborate displays of plenty.

It is precisely because of the cornucopia and yet the imbalance of Buddhism in Taiwan that intelligently administered Buddhist education is so important and that monastics themselves be adequately educated in both secular and religious subjects so that, based on a solid foundation, they can knowledgeably propagate Buddhism. In addition, with numbers of lay Buddhists increasing, it is incumbent upon monastics to become ever more qualified and competent so that they can continue to provide beneficial service and Buddhist instruction.

Even amongst the many Buddhist institutes, however, there are sometimes problems. Often they are managed solely by monastics for monastics. In this situation there can be a lack of understanding of systematic education structure, effective administration and teaching techniques and academic criteria and a failure to conform to any curricular guidelines. Therefore, training in such secular subjects as business administration, computer operation, psychology, social studies and education is essential for monastics to
give them a wider understanding of the education process, and such prominent Buddhist
monastic institutes as Hsiang-kuang Institute and Yuan-kuang Institute near
Hsinchu, are offering germane secular education to meet this need. In order to meet
another new demand, some of the Buddhist institutes are offering selected religious
education courses to Taiwan’s laity and Buddhist youth.

Another problem which can occur when Buddhist institutes are attached to or affiliated
with a temple is that the daily routine of the temple and full-time classes which also
demand long hours of private study and examination preparation can lead to exhaustion
and a large number of student withdrawals. One bhikṣṇī to whom I spoke, who
completed the full four-year Buddhist education program at Yuan-kuang Institute,
described students frequently fainting during prayers and sleeping during classes. Faced
with a rigorous daily program which starts at around 4 am and continues unabated until
nearly 10 pm, during which physical deportment and behaviour are monitored closely,
many students constantly wrestle with the idea of quitting and heading for a less
demanding temple.

There are about 40,000 bhikṣṇīs in Taiwan, mostly living in communities of nuns,
compared to 10,000 bhikṣus. Although it would be an impossible task to describe all

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17 Hsiang-kuang ni-chung fo-hsiēh-yüan.
18 Yuan-kuang fo-hsüeh-yüan.
19 Hua-fan, Chung-hua and Fa-kuang, all in the vicinity of Taipei, are three such institutes which conduct specially designed courses and seminars for lay students.
20 This is not a new situation. Holmes Welch describes a similarly demanding course of study at Kuan-tsung Seminary in Ningpo, China, which was established in 1913. It is documented that some students, unable to bear the strict routine, died of tuberculosis or left the seminary for milder seminaries elsewhere. See Holmes Welch, The Buddhist Revival in China, pp. 107-110.
of them, or even all the nuns’ communities within which they live, it is clear that the Bhikṣuṇī Saṃgha in Taiwan is generally economically independent and wields considerable influence, despite the fact that there are some Vinaya regulations which subordinate nuns to monks. Education has made the nuns strong, qualified and confident.

Few restrictions are placed upon them by the Bhikṣu Saṃgha, who do not always enforce all the relevant rules themselves. However, in temples where both bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs live under an abbot,22 bhikṣuṇīs are less independent and often find that they become virtual servants to the bhikṣus who tend to assume a dominant role. Many nuns to whom I spoke stressed the importance of economic independence, of education and of nuns-only temples where they can be in charge of their own lives and destiny. Except for the giving of ordination,23 and for certain ceremonies of consecration, bhikṣuṇīs are permitted to perform any ceremony or ritual, they can study and be educated to the highest level, and they have plenty of opportunities to develop their potential, be useful in Buddhist society and feel fulfilled.

According to Taiwanese Buddhist scholar, Li Yü-chén, the bhikṣuṇī vocation carries with it a relatively high religious and social status. Although women in lay society and in other Chinese belief systems such as Taoism and shamanism, are subject to traditional cultural discriminations, bhikṣuṇīs can attain the position of a Buddhist Master which brings with it great responsibility and can earn them deserved respect.24 One fundamental reason for

22 There are no accurate statistics for the ratio of bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī temples to bhikṣuṇī temples, however, Heng-ching Fa-shih estimates that about 40 per cent of temples where bhikṣuṇīs live house both bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs (in separate quarters) under an abbot. She explained that temples in mainland China were not mixed, but that in Taiwan the Japanese Buddhist influence and a lack of space in the cities has led to a large proportion of temples being mixed.

23 That is, in a single ordination platform. Qualified bhikṣuṇīs, as mentioned elsewhere, may and should bestow ordination in a ceremony which immediately precedes ordination by the Bhikṣu Saṃgha.

24 Personal communication, Taipei, Taiwan, November 1997.
this situation might be, as Nancy Schuster points out, that the sūtras which shaped the attitudes of early Chinese Buddhists and which, fortuitously, had been among the first texts translated into Chinese, portray women and women’s potential for enlightenment in a positive way.

Such sūtras as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*, the *Lotus*, the *Śūraṅgama* and the *Vimaladatta*, all contain images of articulate and realised women who take on and defeat some of the Buddha’s most prominent disciples in debate. They were followed by other later translations which also identify the equivalence of men and women: the *Śrīmālādevī sūtra* and the *Gaṇḍa-vyūha sūtra* both embody egalitarian views. Even though more misogynistically-oriented translations followed after the fifth century, the earlier, well-loved and affirming sūtra translations were still used, and as a result, predominantly positive views of women’s capabilities prevailed.

Miriam Levering further explains the situation in terms of Ch’an Buddhism which places equal emphasis upon males and females as having the One Mind or Buddha Nature, and stresses their equal capacity for enlightenment. She suggests that it is possible that the Ch’an teaching of enlightenment being available to all beings at all times without discrimination may have contributed to modern Chinese women’s ability to “accept their essential equality with men, viewing centuries of constraint more as a product of an inequitable social structure than as reflecting unequal endowments of intelligence or of

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25 Although Confucianism defined a woman’s place in Chinese society, the positive views shown in the above popular texts allowed spiritual women an unspoken permission to devote themselves to religion. Discriminatory attitudes arose infrequently. In present-day Taiwan, the majority of lay Buddhists know the sūtras well, particularly the enduringly popular *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and *Lotus* sūtras, and the same absence of bias is clearly evident. Although the apotheosis of the Chinese Buddhist nun is long past, today’s nuns continue to enjoy a standing unheard of in most other traditions of Buddhism. See Nancy Schuster, “Striking a Balance: Women and Images of Women in Early Chinese Buddhism” In *Women, Religion and Social Change*, pp. 87-114, Edited by Yvonne Haddad (SUNY Press, Albany, 1985).
moral and spiritual capacities". Focusing on the story of the dragon girl which appears in the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the story of an encounter between a monk and the abbess Mo-shan Liao-jan, she points out that neither woman's gender was a hindrance to her enlightenment. She goes on to say that:

Chinese social structure clearly marked distinctions among old and young, male and female, noble and base. The rhetoric of Ch'ān denied such distinctions not only any ultimate importance in themselves, but also any relevance to enlightenment. No characteristic could ultimately be a prerequisite, or a barrier, to attaining enlightenment. ²⁶

Heng-ching Fa-shih believes that, as functioning members of the Buddhist Saṅgha, the main role that nuns should play in the Buddhist society of Taiwan today is that of religious teachers to convey accurately the substance of Buddhism and to counter wrong and confused views which have been inherited from the past. ²⁷ She explained to me that until recently the stance of the Taiwan government was one of non-recognition of religious education based upon Taiwan's constitutional policy of separation of church and state, and the consequent total secularisation of public education. ²⁸

²⁷ Interview conducted at Taiwan National University, October, 1995.
²⁸ According to Charles Jones (*op.cit.*), many religious leaders are concerned that the curriculum used by the school system oversteps dispassionate barring of religious courses and verges on "active hostility". This situation has caused many Buddhists to consider setting up a specifically Buddhist education system "where students could obtain a quality education within a Buddhist environment." Because the establishment of private universities was prohibited by the government until 1985, such plans have remained on the drawing board, and even with the relaxing of the prohibition, plans for a Buddhist university, Hsūan-tsang Buddhist University, were dogged at every turn by government intransigence and disorganisation. Its founding was finally permitted subject to its demotion to Hsūan-tsang Technical College, based on the government's appraisal that only three kinds of universities were relevant to educational needs: medical, industrial and technical. Although the situation is changing, working to overcome the long-term suppression of religious education is a difficult task. Other prominent Buddhist education leaders are applying to upgrade their pre-existing Buddhist institutes and seminaries to the level of a university. The first four to do this are Fo-kuang Shan, Buddhist Compassion Relief Tz'u Chi Foundation, Dharma Drum Mountain (Fa-ku Shan) and Hua-fan College of Humanities and Technology. Permission has since been granted for these four colleges and Hsūan-tsang to acquire the status of a secular university within the structure of which is a Department of Religion.
or Buddhist education courses exist at any level in the secular school curricula and even
the diplomas of the most highly regarded Buddhist institutes and seminaries continue to
be refused recognition by the government. Without official status or any
acknowledgement of their curricula and acceptance of their graduates, standardisation is
an almost impossible task. As a result their management is open to abuse to the possible
detriment of the students' education. Another consequence of their independent operation
is that there have been power struggles within the managerial hierarchies of some
institutes, on occasions resulting in damage to their reputations and reduced support from
the laity.

Heng-ching Fa-shih believes that a second vital responsibility that nuns have to society is
to carefully guard their behaviour and their observance of the monastic precepts so that a
good image of Buddhist monks and nuns is taught by example.

A third task which today's nuns have is that of obligation to society, of being the
representatives of Buddhism within society, to inspire the community and ensure the
religion's continued prosperity and pure transmission. They believe it is important not
merely to pay lip-service to the wider society but to become involved in some aspects of
social welfare and interrelationship with the community and to actually connect with
individuals on a personal level.

In fulfilling these functions, nuns are the mainstay of Taiwanese Buddhist society. On
several occasions I have heard monks themselves say that Buddhism in Taiwan is strong
because of the activities and the energy of the nuns. Although monks predominate in
conducting most of the large ceremonies or giving addresses which often thousands of
people attend, and although some monks are tireless in their work for the disadvantaged
and the marginalised, at the grassroots level where involvement in and relationship with the lay community is the most important, my impression from observing Buddhist life in Taiwan is that nuns bear the greater share of responsibility and work the harder.

During the course of my field-work in Taiwan, I discovered that there are almost as many ways and reasons to practise monastic Buddhism as there are monastics. I met modern, well-educated nuns, some of whom have doctorates or other higher educational qualifications and who entertain fresh, even radical, ideas for Buddhist practice and monastic life. I met highly traditional nuns who have gained a thorough knowledge of temple administration, organisation and ritual and who form the foundation of efficient and enduring temple management throughout Taiwan.

I met wandering nuns, a nun who is meditating in a small, simple hut in the mountains, a nun who is currently attending her third institute in order to gain a comprehensive Buddhist education and who plans to enter a long retreat at the conclusion of her studies, and a nun who spends her time talking to prisoners on death row. I met a nun who gives weekly Buddhist discourses on nationwide television, a nun who commutes between Taiwan and America to ensure the branch temple is running smoothly, a nun who has chosen to live alone in the Himalayas to study Sanskrit and Tibetan, a highly articulate nun who dedicates much of her time to the relief of animal suffering and abuse, and many others who have discovered ways to make their lives and the lives of those around them meaningful.

I visited several nunneries in the mountains where many old nuns spend their days reading sūtras and reciting Amitābha’s name (nien fo tao-ch’ang ). In Taipei I visited small centres where groups of nuns live and devote their time to performing necessary
ceremonies for the lay community (ching-ch’ an tao-ch’ ang ). I visited country temples where nuns excel in temple cooking, making creative use of fresh home-grown ingredients for their communities. There are nunneries dedicated to the consummate observance and practice of Vinaya (chih-chieh tao-ch’ ang ), where nuns follow not only the spirit but also the rule of Vinaya to the letter, where every precept is vigilantly maintained and every monastic obligation is kept. And there are nuns’ temples which place priority on Buddhist education (fo-hsüeh-yüan ). Nuns work at the Chinese Buddhist Association and at the Chinese Young Buddhist Association organising Buddhist events and administrating lay activities. Nuns run radio programs, edit Buddhist magazines, conduct student classes and summer camps, teach children, counsel the sick and dying, help the homeless and disturbed youth offenders and undertake environmental and wildlife protection programs. Nuns are in charge of hospitals and universities. They write books, poetry, articles and lectures, paint calligraphy, give instruction in Vinaya and teach new nuns to be good nuns.

Whether they are living in large, traditional temples, in small hermitages, in office blocks in the city or in simple houses and small centres, they are primarily devoting their time to virtue and to cultivation. Some temples operate in a highly structured way with every hour accounted for in worship, education, service and work. Other temples, observing every minute detail of Vinaya, traditional Chinese temple routine and ch’ an practice, do not have extensive contact with the outside world and their activities are greatly limited by rules. There are temples where there is no formal Buddhist education and where the nuns spend a large amount of time in sūtra recitation, rituals for the lay community, manual temple chores or in work to raise money for the temple, such as by making candles, incense and packaged foods, or by operating a temple shop.
Whatever style and routine a temple chooses to follow, however, all appear to observe twice daily devotions (*erh t'ang*) in their Buddha halls which to a greater or lesser degree conform to traditional worship in mainland Chinese temples. As in China, morning and evening prayers are looked upon as occupying a central and essential part of temple life. All temple residents must be present at the twice-daily worship unless they are ill or are attending to such temple tasks as cooking meals. However simplified these prayer sessions may have become, morning devotions always contain the *Śūraṇgama mantra* (*Leng-yen chou*) to ward off obstacles and negative influences, recitation of the Triple Refuge (*San kuei-i*) and Praise to the temple guardian, Wei-t’o Bodhisattva (*Wei-t’o p’u-sa*). Evening devotions usually include the *Āmitābha sūtra* (*A-mi-t’o ching*), confession to the 88 Buddhas (*Pa-shih-pa fo*), recitation of the *Heart sūtra* (*Hsin-ching*), recitation of the Triple Refuge and praises to the tutelary deities (*Ch’ieh-lan*). On the full and new moon and on the occasion of important days of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, there is some variation and elaboration.

There are many outstanding nuns who have made recognised and lasting contributions to Taiwanese Buddhism and society. In Hualien, a town on Taiwan’s central east coast, lives a bhikṣunī who is now in her late fifties, Cheng-yen Fa-shih. When I was taken to her simple but beautiful temple, The Abode of Still Thoughts, to meet her, I knew nothing about her except that she had founded a hospital which had grown to be one of the greatest in Taiwan, and that she helped people in distress. I waited for her to come out of her room. A diminutive, serene bhikṣunī emerged who was so light on her feet she almost floated, and the group of disciples standing outside immediately dropped to their knees. A cool breeze seemed to accompany her, and as she touched some people,
inquired about others and took everyone into her gaze, compassion radiated from her eyes.

She states that her entire reason for living is to serve beings and, motivated by the sufferings she had witnessed in her life, she had mobilised the local people to begin saving fifty cents a day. From such a small beginning the Compassion Relief Tz’ü Chi Foundation grew, which since 1966 has contributed funding for medical purposes, construction, education, help for the poor and aid to disasters in many parts of the world and offers medical treatment to all, regardless of their financial situation, in its modern hospital which was completed in 1986. In 1992, the Tz’ü Chi Medical Research Centre was opened, followed by the Centre for Medical Genetics in 1993. The Foundation has also built schools, a cultural centre, a College of Medicine and a nursing college.

For thirty years Cheng-yen Fa-shih has pursued her work of helping the poor, the ill and the homeless, and the organisation continues to concentrate its activities in the four major areas of charity, medicine, education and culture. With the support and recognition of millions of Taiwanese, including President Lee T’eng-hui, one bhikṣuṇī surrounded by a group of devoted nuns is able to create and maintain an establishment committed to principles of honesty and integrity where all living beings are seen as deserving of being

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30 Tz’ü Chi Foundation began with thirty members and in 1994 had over 3,000,000 world-wide.
31 Countries where she has made contributions include Nepal, Rwanda, India, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Mongolia, Cambodia, Alaska, Thailand, Ethiopia and South Africa.
32 The late President of Taiwan, President Chiang Ching-kuo once said “I have been all over China, Taiwan and its outer islands, and I have never seen an organisation like Tz’ü Chi - to have built itself such a small temple, yet constructed such a big hospital for others!” (from Tz’ü Chi Foundation promotional booklet, *Let Ten Thousand Lotuses of the Heart Bloom in this World*). In 1994, the hospital had 645 beds in 24 departments and the out-patient clinic saw 1,500 patients a day. There are plans for several new projects to be opened in the near future.
Taiwan

Cheng-yen Fa-shih, Abbess of the Abode of Still Thoughts, and Founder of Compassion Relief T'zu Chi Foundation, both in Hualien, Taiwan.

Shig Hui Wan (Hsiao-yün Fa-shih), Abbess of the Lotus Buddhist Ashram and Sino-Indian Institute of Buddhist Studies, and Founder of Hua-fan Institute of Humanities and Technology, Taipei, Taiwan, standing beside the Buddha statue which graces the Buddha Hall of the Lotus Buddhist Ashram.
treated with the same kindness.

Another nun who has made great contributions to the equally important field of education and culture is Hsiao-yün Fa-shih (she prefers the Cantonese pronunciation, Hiu-wan), who although now in her late eighties, is still active in promoting Buddhist education and practice and who continues with great energy to give daily lectures to her students. I have met her on several occasions, the most recent being in 1995 at her newly completed Hua-fan Institute of Humanities and Technology, the first secular university in Taiwan founded by Buddhists. She sat cross-legged on a chair at a low table on which stood Japanese bonsai and her sūtra books. Gesturing with beautiful hands which have executed since her youth in Kuangtung Province the fine calligraphy and Chinese paintings for which she is famous, she held her audience of lay students and nun disciples captivated.

Hiu-wan Fa-shih has travelled widely, and spent four years in India, studying at Tagore University in West Bengal. She emphasises *Prajñā* (wisdom) and Ch’an as inseparable and indispensable and the study of the doctrines of other Buddhist schools as essential; she herself is well-versed in the teachings of the Ch’an and T’ien-t’ai sects. In 1970, she founded the Lotus Buddhist Ashram focusing on undergraduate studies, followed by the Institute for Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies in 1980, which offers graduate studies. Many nuns have graduated from both these institutes. She believes that intending nuns should meditate and train until they really know who they are. Some of her disciples have been

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33 “Hua-fan ren-wen k’o-shu-yālan”. The 1994/95 Mini-Guide to Hua-fan Institute, which in 1995 had one graduate institute and seven departments, lists in its overview the promotion of the following aims: “The Enlightened Education, the humanistic spirits of Confucian and Buddhist education, the integration of humanities and technology, and compassion and wisdom.” Hiu-wan Fa-shih is herself the Head of the Graduate Institute of Oriental Humanities, and she teaches Buddhism, Prajñā Ch’an, T’ien-t’ai Thought, Ch’an Painting and Buddhist Art.
novices for more than the prescribed two years. She said to me, “I know who I am. I have shaved my hair. I am a bhikṣuṇī.” These words were not lightly spoken, but carried with them the weight of conviction in her life and identity.

Hiu-wan Fa-shih’s cultivation of ch’an is evident in her movements. She walks lightly, she is focused and alert while at the same time her demeanour is composed. On each occasion I have met her, she has taken me to her ch’an hall and we have sat together for a few moments. She presented me with a copy of a painting she did herself of the Buddha meditating, on his face a peaceful expression which she saw in a vision and which has also been created on the white stone Burmese Buddha statue which graces the main hall of the Lotus Buddhist Ashram.

Nuns such as Cheng-yen Fa-shih and Hiu-wan Fa-shih live and work in Taiwan and, with the support of their male peers, they quietly pursue their goals of propagating Buddhism, bettering society and turning out well-educated and purposeful nuns. In Taiwan now, it is possible for nuns to be involved in any sphere of activity in which monastics are active and, as stated above, very often they outshine their monk counterparts. But there is another aspect to this situation. The General Secretary of the Chinese Young Buddhist Association34 stated what I have frequently seen and heard: that although Chinese culture and Buddhism are seen as two separate things, traditional cultural attitudes exert a noticeable influence within Buddhism. As a result, it is still from among the monks, who make up only about twenty per cent of the monastic population as a whole, that the most prominent and influential Sangha members come.

This cultural constraint, although allowing nuns to be more numerous than monks and to

34 Informal discussion with Venerable Hai-t’ ao, General Secretary of the Chinese Young Buddhist Association, Taipe, November, 1996.
have the same educational and leadership opportunities, at the same time does not permit nuns to move around from one temple to another as freely as monks can, and to learn from other masters or to explore as easily other avenues of monastic pursuit and experience. The automatic and largely unspoken continuation of traditional values still prevents nuns from entering the highest echelon of the Saṃgha no matter how widely experienced and educated they are. Nothing, however, prevents nuns from being almost universally respected within Taiwanese Buddhist society and from playing a vital and outstanding role in that society.

2 BECOMING A NUN IN CONTEMPORARY TAIWAN

For Buddhist nuns and monks, ordination represents an outward marker of the inner commitment to religious life and to participation in monasticism as a lifelong path. It is seen by them as the most beneficial way in which they can practise their faith and fulfil their spiritual aspirations. Chinese women undergo three main stages in the ordination process, the first two of which, postulancy (hsing-che) and novitiate (sha-mi-ni), usually take place at the temple at which they live after choosing monasticism. The last stage, ordination as a bhikṣuṇī, takes place at an elaborate ordination ceremony held in different temples each year, as described below.

Christian nuns follow a similar sequence of stages in their assumption of vows, becoming first a postulant, which corresponds to the Chinese Buddhist hsing-che, then a novice and finally a fully professed nun, which corresponds to the bhikṣuṇī. Catriona Clear describes this process in *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*:

The process of becoming a religious was a three-stage one. Acceptance ushered in a short probationary period known as postulantship; reception marked the beginning of
It is clear that even some elements of the rituals for entering religious life are similar between Buddhism and Christianity. Karma Lekshe Tsomo states in *Sisters in Solitude*:

> In the ritual of entering the religious life, identical elements can be found: review of the candidate’s qualifications, the profession of intent to lead the religious life, prostration at the feet of the community elders, changes in name and dress, and so forth.

There are also marked differences between the monastic traditions of Buddhism and Christianity. The long and complex ordination training and ritual found in Chinese Buddhism is exceptional and arguably unique in its depth and symbolism.

Every year in Taiwan at least one and sometimes two temples offer the Triple Platform Ordination. Notices are placed in Buddhist journals and circulated among Taiwanese temples advising intending participants of the location, dates, the names of the main ordination masters, the closing date for applications and the fee. Intending applicants must obtain a registration form, submit it duly completed in all particulars to the temple hosting the ordination and await the decision.

Applicants must give their full secular and Buddhist names, date and place of birth, identification card number, a summary of their educational experience and standard, their current temple name and position within that temple, the date when they first shaved their head as a *ch’u-chia jen* (left-home person) and the name of the attending master. In

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37 The ordination is called Triple Platform because it traditionally offers three sets of vows: novice and full ordination and the Bodhisattva Precepts.
38 ‘Master’ is the accepted translation of *shih-fu* and is used interchangeably for both monks and nuns who are acknowledged as being spiritually accomplished.
addition they must furnish the signature and seal of their present master and that master’s ordination date and credentials, giving them permission to attend the Triple Platform Ordination. Finally they are asked to write an account of their life experiences before ordination, their reasons and hopes for choosing the monastic life, and to affix a recent photograph to the registration form.  

All applicants are thoroughly screened before being accepted for ordination, often being required to attend an interview. If registration forms are not completed satisfactorily, in particular containing the permission of the applicant’s master, he or she will not be accepted for ordination. Most applicants are already novice monks or nuns, having lived up to several years in their own home temple, training for ordination and learning basic temple routine and monastic procedure, so receiving novice precepts during the ordination ceremony is a formality only. There are some, however, who are still at the stage of ch’u-chia and will receive their novice precepts for the first time during the ordination ceremony, either leaving the ordination temple at that point and returning to their home temple for further training and experience, or continuing on to receive full ordination and bodhisattva precepts. In addition, during the last week of the Triple Platform Ordination, many lay people join the temple to receive the five lay precepts and the bodhisattva precepts. 

Candidates come from temples all over Taiwan, and will return as fully ordained bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs to these temples at the conclusion of the ordination ceremonies. Overseas participants from such countries as Singapore, Malaysia and Korea and even from Chinese temples in America also register for ordination in Taiwan, because it is well-

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39 See Appendix 2 for a reproduction of the 1996 Triple Platform Ordination application form.
The largest ordination ceremony ever held in Taiwan. In 1990, 709 ordinees participated in a Triple Platform Ordination ceremony at Wan-fo Temple, Taichung.
known for thorough procedure. Candidates range in age from the minimum age of twenty to over sixty, although the majority of those receiving ordination are usually between twenty and thirty years old.

Many months of preparation and organisation are involved for a temple to host the Triple Platform Ordination. Sponsors must be found, hundreds of robes (chia-sha), bowing cloths (chü) and begging bowls (po) must be made, texts containing the lines to be memorised and recited by the candidates need to be printed and many necessary items for the use of the ordinees must be purchased, including quilts, pillows, plastic bowls, towels and bathroom slippers, personal articles, eating utensils and kneeling cushions. A willing crew of lay workers is mobilised to take charge of the daily laundry, the cooking of two full meals and numerous tea and snacks a day for up to 600 people, cleaning the temple and arranging the numerous offerings of flowers and fruit which arrive each day. Lay people also set up stalls selling religious items and discounted robes, shoes and warm monastic clothing, including jackets and caps, to ward off the damp cold which pervades Taiwan in November and December, the months when ordination is traditionally given.

When intending ordinees arrive at the temple carrying a small bag of possessions, they complete final registration details and are then shown to their sleeping places which

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usually take the form of a foam mat in a large room full of similar mats. From that moment onwards they are bound by the rules of the temple which are clearly explained to them and which are listed in a small handbook. During the course of the 33 days, many texts are distributed as the need for them arises. Although these vary slightly at each ordination, the principal texts distributed are the novice Vinaya (Sha-mi lü-i), Vinaya for daily use (P’i-ni jih yung), bhikṣu or bhikṣunī Vinaya (Ssu-fen lü pi-ch’iu / pi-ch’iu-ni chieh pen), the Brahma Net Sūtra containing the bodhisattva precepts (Fan-wang ching p’u-sa chieh pen) and the book of questions and responses used during the ordination ceremonies themselves (San t’an ta chieh fo shih (wen ta ch’ang sung) chien tsė).

On the first evening, the ordinees are assembled in the order which they will maintain throughout the ordination period and into which they organise themselves daily before proceeding in lines to and from the Buddha-hall and the refectory, chanting the Buddha’s name. The assembly is made up of two sides, east and west, in which the ordinees are arranged in lines (pan) of nine people on each side, monks to the front and nuns behind them. The head of each line is responsible for its members, for giving in the

41 In pre-1949 mainland China many intending monks and nuns arrived at the monastery early and lived, sometimes for up to several weeks, in the wandering Sangha hall. According to Holmes Welch, this period of time was known as the ‘hall of sojourn’ (chi-t’ang) and the guests had no duties to perform except an obligation to attend morning and evening worship (The Practice of Chinese Buddhism: 1900-1950, p. 287). This custom is not observed in Taiwan, and the majority of ordinees arrive the day before proceedings formally begin. This corresponds to the traditional second period of time called ‘division into classes’ (fen-t’ang) at which point no more candidates are accepted and training begins in earnest.

42 Ni and Seng pu shou ts’e or Hsin chieh shou ts’e. This handbook also contains the rules governing the visiting hours for guests, using the telephone and using the bathrooms. In addition it provides the daily timetable, the schedule for the three ordination platforms and other important events and the table of daily classes and sessions.

43 The lines contain a number divisible by three, because at the time of the bhikṣu and bhikṣunī ordination platforms, the ordinees proceed to the inner chamber in ‘altars’ (t’an) of three.
collected laundry each day, for distributing texts, robes and offerings and for reporting if someone is sick.

The entire assembly is presided over by ten senior bhikṣu and ten bhikṣuni instructors (yin-li shih), headed by the k’ai-t’ang ho-shang (literally, the one who opens the class), all of whom instruct the candidates in all aspects of monastic deportment. Even though they may already be conversant with these matters, they learn again how to eat, how to stand, sit, walk and sleep, how to dress and fold their bedding, how to enter the Buddha-hall, how to make offerings, offer prostrations, organise their robes when kneeling, bowing and sitting and how to wear the new robes and use the bowing cloths. In addition, the twenty training masters are present at all training sessions, rehearsals for ceremonies, meals and classes and are strategically placed, or pace between the rows watching their charges and periodically correcting mistakes or slack deportment.

The instructors are chosen for their knowledge and compassion and for their experience and ability to cope with any matters which may arise. Master Chen-hua describes the instructors at his ordination at Pao-hua Mountain in China, and compares them to the Taiwanese instructors of today:

The ordination instructors at Pao-hua Mountain were the most unreasonable, most unfeeling people I have ever come in contact with in my life. Their attitude toward ordinees was: “When in the right, give them three loads to carry; when in the wrong, make them carry three loads.”... In recent years, ordination masters in Taiwan have treated ordinees with compassion and consideration. This is a praise-worthy way of doing things. But the way of doing things at Pao-hua Mountain was exactly the opposite. ... The ordination instructors at Pao-hua Mountain had excellent deportment and were dedicated to teaching monastic rules, but they were overly severe. In fact, they were severe to the point of cruelty.44

Ten separate senior masters are called upon to bestow the three sets of vows. Chief

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amongst these is the ordaining abbot (Skt. sīla-upādhyāya; Ch. te-chieh ho-shang) who represents the Buddha. Representing Manjuśri, Buddha of Wisdom, the confessor, (Skt. karma ācārya; Ch. chieh-mo ho-shang) sits on his left, while the instructing ācārya (Ch. chiao-shou ho-shang), representing Maitreya, the Future Buddha, sits on his right. The remaining seven masters are collectively called witnesses (tsun-cheng). Sometimes the ordaining abbot is the abbot of the temple hosting the ordination platform, but very often all ten masters are invited from elsewhere because of their seniority, knowledge of procedure and incorruptibility. If there is to be a dual ordination for the bhikṣuṇī candidates present, there will also be ten senior bhikṣuṇī masters bearing the same titles and positions. Their role will be to question the candidates about their suitability, and then the three senior among them will transmit the bhikṣuṇī precepts while the remaining seven will serve as witnesses, in an identical ceremony to that which immediately follows and is transmitted by the bhikṣu masters.

The daily schedule, which varies slightly as the month progresses and is adjusted to accommodate the three ordination platforms, is very intense. What follows is the schedule which was observed at the 1996 Triple Platform Ordination in Ilan county in north-east Taiwan. Comparison with the 1982 ordination in Taipei, the 1990 ordination in Taichung and the 1993 ordination in Kaohsiung reveal only minor differences:

- **4.30 am**
  - Rise to the sound of bamboo clapper (ssu pan)
- **5.00 - 6.00**
  - Morning prayers (tsao-k’o)
- **6.15 - 6.45**
  - Breakfast of rice gruel (tsao chou)
- **7.00 - 7.30**
  - Temple chores (tso wu)
- **8.00 - 10.45**
  - Class for explanation of precepts (chiang-chieh)
11.00 - 11.40 Confession ceremony in the Buddha-hall (shang-kung)
11.45 - 12.20 pm Lunch, served with full ceremonial ritual (kuo-t’ang)
12.30 - 2.15 Rest (yang-hsi) and memorise lines to be recited during ordinations
2.30 - 4.30 Practice ritual, ordination ceremonies, using new robes and bowing cloths (yen-li)
5.00 - 6.00 Evening prayers (wan-k‘o)
6.15 - 6.45 Evening food, not a solid meal (yao-shih)
8.00 - 9.15 Ritual confession, sitting meditation (li-ch’an, ching-tso)
9.30 Evening clapper and silence (erh pan, chih-ching)

The 33-day training and ordination program is divided into sections, during which specific lessons are given which relate to the particular ordination platform at hand. For the first week, morning teaching classes are devoted to the novice precepts, while afternoon classes concentrate on general deportment and use of the requisites of a monastic. My own report, written at the time of my ordination in 1982 includes this description of an afternoon spent learning to bow:

The instructions given in bowing, kneeling and standing involved the shih-fus demonstrating how these actions are performed correctly, and again, each action included several precise steps. First two shih-fu s demonstrated these to the entire assembly, and then we divided up into our groups and the individual shih-fu s schooled us rigorously. All over the hall, lines of candidates could be seen practising bowing or kneeling in unison, up and down, many times over. After we had been drilled in lines, we were then drilled in twos or threes, and finally individually. The shih-fu s were not satisfied until each line bowed and knelt in complete harmony, and every small detail was taken into account. Then the candidates reassembled and the leading bhikṣu shih-fu critically and minutely examined the entire hall practising together. For many days we were drilled in this way, and even when we moved on from these lessons, sometimes the shih-fu s would return to them and make us practise again.45

After a week, instruction in daily Vinaya requirements begins in the afternoons, while morning teachings introduce the bodhisattva precepts. Five days before the novice ordination platform, which takes place a little over two weeks into the program, intense instruction about the ordination ceremony itself begins, and the brown five-patch novice robe (wu-i), the bowing cloth and the begging bowl are temporarily distributed. The ordinees are taught how to use these items, how to request the precepts and perform the essential confession ceremony which precedes novice, and all other ordination platforms, and how to recite and chant the prayers and refrains which occur during the ordination itself. They begin actual rehearsals for novice ordination at the same time, and finally are ready to present themselves for the first ordination platform.

The three ordination ceremonies follow the same general pattern, although the higher ordinations are more complex. The novice ordination consists of a short preliminary ritual which is performed by the ordinees to request the precepts from the three principal precepts masters. The same afternoon, after head shaving and bathing, a separate repentance ceremony is held during which sets of questions concerning the candidates' suitability are put and answered, and a session of bowing and chanting is performed to the chiming of a small bell. During the bowing session, each line of candidates proceeds to a small table and individually answers to their names, which are called one by one, by responding 'A-mi-t'o-fo'.

Each line then enters an inner chamber where the chieh-mo ho-shang sits alone at a table. As he chants the questions which must be answered he hits the table with a small hammer for emphasis at the completion of each question. The line of kneeling ordinees must answer whether they have committed the five heinous crimes or indulged in the ten non-
Bhiksuni Ordination

Orderliness characterises all activities during the ordination training period, so that they become opportunities for mindfulness and care. The eating of meals is a time for internal contemplation and for harmony of action. All ordinands follow ritualised routines and gestures to pray before and after the meal, to eat the food, to request more and to handle the bowls and utensils.

New novice monks and nuns, wearing the five-patched chia-sha, having received the ten novice precepts from the three principal abbots, file from the ordination hall, led by two yin-li shih-fu playing the small bell and wooden fish.

After the first platform of the Triple Platform Ordination, novice ordination, ordinands begin training for the second platform, bhiksuni ordination. They are given the nine-patched yellow ceremonial robe which they will wear at the second part of the bhiksuni ordination, the Inner Platform.
As each line enters and leaves the inner chamber, the assembly continues repentance bowing with the entire procedure lasting until well into the night.

The next day the actual precepts are received. Four representatives of the prospective monks and four of the nuns leave the Buddha Hall accompanied by two yin-li shih to summon and conduct the three main Precepts Masters, dressed in their ceremonial gold robe over which a red, 25-patched chia-sha is worn, and carrying their ritual seals of office. As the entire assembly bows low from the waist, they enter to the beating of a deep drum and proceed to the platform to open the ceremony. The ten novice precepts are received, and the five- and seven-patched (ch'i-i) chia-sha are distributed and worn. The bowing cloth and begging bowl are also handed out at this ceremony with the entire assembly proceeding in line before the Precepts Masters to receive the bowls in their hands, blessed by the three main Masters in turn. Although the seven-patched chia-sha and the bowl are for use after full ordination is bestowed, immediately before full ordination questions are put as to whether the candidate is already in possession of robes and a bowl and so they are distributed during novice ordination.

Finally, ten questions relating to the ten novice precepts are asked of all the new novices and dedication prayers are chanted. The three Precepts Masters ceremoniously leave the hall, the novices taking one step forward to symbolise personally conducting them out.

As instruction continues in the bodhisattva precepts, classes in the 250 bhikṣu and 348

46 The five heinous crimes are killing one’s father, mother, an Arhat, shedding a Buddha’s blood and creating a schism in the Saṅgha. The ten non-virtues fall into three groups: three non-virtues of body, namely, killing, sexual misconduct, stealing; four non-virtues of speech, namely, lying, idle gossip, slander, harsh speech; three non-virtues of mind, namely, covetousness, ill-will, wrong views.

47 The ten novice precepts are against indulging in killing; stealing; sexual conduct; lying; taking intoxicants; singing, dancing, playing music; wearing perfume, ornaments and cosmetics; sitting on a high bed or throne; eating after midday and touching precious objects or gold and silver.
bhikṣuṇī precepts are introduced. In addition training begins for the second ordination platform itself and as its days draw closer, rehearsals of the actual ceremonies are practised. At this time, repentance bowing is intensified, and in addition to the organised bowing sessions, many ordinees perform extra confessions and prayer recitations, often late into the night. On the day before the second ordination platform, the abbots conduct a special ancestor (*tsu-hsien*) ritual to save beings in the suffering realms, while the ordinees continue to bow in the Buddha-hall.

A little over three weeks into the program, the second ordination platform begins in the same way as the first, with ordination candidates wearing the *chia-sha* presenting themselves to the three principal Precept Masters for a brief ceremony to request the precepts. On the same afternoon, heads are shaved and baths are taken followed by the repentance ceremony during which, as in the novice ordination, candidates answer to their names, and in this case, indicate their pure adherence to the novice precepts. Confessional bowing then continues in the Buddha-hall until midnight.

The bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī ordination ceremony itself consists of two sections, an outer and an inner platform. The outer platform is short, simple and public, with the remaining seven masters, the witnesses, who have up until this point been absent, presenting themselves for formal introduction to the assembly. All ten Masters are then asked if they approve of the candidates put forward for ordination.

The inner platform, which takes place the same evening, is conducted in strict seclusion in an inner chamber. On mainland China, large monasteries often possessed special ordination platforms (*chieh-t'ai*) which were frequently screened from the rest of the monastery in a secluded ordination complex used only during such ceremonies. They
contained separate dormitories and washing areas for male and female ordinees, training halls, kitchen and dining facilities, quarters for the training masters and the ordination platform itself, which was often quite elaborate. This is not the case in Taiwan, where the inner platform is usually a small shrine room off to the side of the Buddha Hall.

Proceeding to the inner platform, the candidates enter a small ante-chamber line-by-line, where they robe in all three chia-sha, including the ceremonial yellow nine-patched robe, bow on outspread cloths and kneel to answer preliminary questions. Following this brief ritual, the candidates enter the inner chamber in groups of three (t'an) where, kneeling before the ten venerable Precepts Masters, they again answer a long list of questions about their physical and mental well-being, their suitability for ordination and their circumstances. They are then questioned about their ability to maintain the four bhikṣu or eight bhikṣuṇī root precepts, contravention of which brings with it automatic expulsion from the monastic community. The precepts are then received in a very solemn and highly charged atmosphere. Each group of ordinees proceeds in the same way to the inner chamber and then joins the assembly in the Buddha-hall to continue bowing until all have received their vows.

Traditionally, the prospective bhikṣuṇīs would also be presented before ten venerable bhikṣuṇī masters to be questioned, ascertained as to suitability and then ordained, prior to their questioning and subsequent ordination by the bhikṣu masters. However, as mentioned in Section I, this important and highly meaningful section of the ordination

48 See J. Prip-Møller's description of the ordination unit given in Chinese Buddhist Monasteries. He includes a floor plan of the ordination complex at Pao-kuang Ssu in Hsintu, Szechwan, and describes the purposes of its various components. (pp. 297-8).
49 Each group of three is called an ‘altar’ and is numbered. In the ordination yearbook all ordinees are listed under their numbered t’an.
ceremony is frequently omitted and its continued performance has long been broken. As a result, many masters do not see the necessity of its inclusion on a regular basis in ordination platforms, preferring instead to offer it only every few years as a blessing and a reminder of correct procedure. Its omission in no way lessens the validity of the transmission by bhikṣus of bhikṣunī vows to women ordinees, but does indirectly reduce the role of bhikṣunī masters in ordination ceremonies.

By the arrival of the second last day, with memorisation and rehearsal completed for the third and final platform, bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs bathe and have their heads shaved. They then attend the usual ceremony to request the bodhisattva precepts, followed in the afternoon by the repentance ritual, during which questions are put by the precepts master. Late in the evening, the ritual of burning incense cones (jan- hsiang) on the head is held.

This tradition of burning moxa, which has its origins in mainland Chinese Buddhism, has a two-fold function. Firstly, during the mid-Ch'ing dynasty when the Yung-cheng Emperor (1723-1736) suspended the issuing of ordination certificates, fully-ordained monks and nuns were required to burn small scars as substitute proof of their ordination status. It was quite common for people to dress in robes and demand the privileges of a monastic, and in the absence of ordination certificates, head-burning represented a means of identification which pretenders would perhaps not have the gall to undergo. The second purpose of incense burning and one of far greater significance and profundity, was as a demonstration of faith in the Buddha and of willingness to undergo pain for the sake of all beings, and it is with this intention that today’s monks and nuns undergo the ritual.

After filing into the ordination hall and bowing to the Buddha, the ten ordaining abbots proceed to the platform to perform the first part of the bhiksu and bhiksuni ordination, the Outer Platform. At this time, the abbots, seven of whom have up until this point been absent, introduce themselves to the ordinees and are asked if they approve of the candidates put forward for ordination.

New novice nuns kneel during a practice session for the bhiksuni ordination ceremony.

The final day of the Triple Platform Ordination when new bhiksus and bhiksunis receive bodhisattva precepts.
Line by line, first monks and then nuns take their place at the entrance of the inner chamber to be marked on the head with three ink circles and given a small red packet containing three small incense cones. They then proceed into the chamber and take their places kneeling at a table with the bowing cloth wrapped firmly around their shoulders. The *yin-li* shih-fu *s attach the cones with vegetable paste and light them, the head is held firmly to prevent flinching and as the cones burn down, chanting of the Buddha’s name by the assembly rises to a crescendo. Watermelon or radish strips are then applied to cool the head and the new monks and nuns emerge with only the actual receiving of bodhisattva precepts still ahead of them.

At this point, the many hundreds of lay people who have joined the ordination temple one week before to receive the five lay precepts and the bodhisattva precepts, now take their places in line to enter the inner chamber and receive incense cones on their inner forearms. The entire ritual usually ends just before dawn, at which time morning devotions are offered before the assembly retires for a few hours sleep before breakfast and the bodhisattva precept ceremony.

Both monks and nuns and the lay participants receive the bodhisattva precepts in a transmission from the three venerable precept masters, while all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are summoned to be witnesses. The assembly is questioned as follows:

Are you a Bodhisattva?

Are you constantly able to keep the Buddha in mind and keep close to good people?

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51 The process takes only a few minutes and although some signs of nervousness are sometimes shown beforehand, I witnessed no displays of fear or pain during the burning itself. It is a personal choice as to how many burns, in increments of three, are received, up to a maximum of twelve.
Are you able to give up evil friends?

Are you able to keep the Precepts at the cost of your life?

Are you able to recite Mahāyāna sūtras and understand their deep meaning?

Are you able to give rise to a faithful mind to reach Supreme Bodhi?

If you see a sentient being in distress, will you save or protect them?

According to your ability, can you give offerings to the Triple Gem?

Are you able to be filial to your parents and respectful to your Masters?

Will you give up laxity and diligently seek the Buddha’s Path?

Are you able to control your mind in the midst of the vexations of the five senses?

Four great vows are then made:

Sentient beings without limit, I vow to deliver;

Defilements without number, I vow to eradicate;

Dharma doors without end, I vow to study;

Supreme Buddha’s Path, I vow to accomplish.

After the Precept transmission, questions are put as to whether the recipients can keep the ten major bodhisattva precepts. 52 (There are also 48 minor precepts.) The transmission of wisdom is accompanied by the passing around of the wisdom staff (hsi-chang).53

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52 Not to: deprive any being of life; steal or misuse any material; indulge in improper sex; speak falsehood or act unjustly; deal in intoxicants; find fault with others; boast about oneself in front of others; begrudge requests for help or ignore the pleas of the needy; become angry and despise others; dishonour the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).

53 The symbology of the staff is explained during the course of instructions. Traditionally monks in ancient India had carried the staff on their begging rounds and knocked it on the ground outside doors, its bronze rings rousing the residents. Various parts of the staff symbolise certain aspects of the Buddhist teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Interdependent Links, Mt. Meru as the centre of the universe, and Voidness itself.
which is touched by two fingers of the right hand (left hand in the case of bhikṣus). It is said that the transmission of this staff is able to imbue the recipient with great power, wisdom and the strength and ability to save beings.

Ordination certificates \( (ch'ieh-tieh) \)\(^{54}\) and ordination yearbooks \( (t'ung-chieh-lu) \) are distributed, the final lunch is taken and the three principal precept masters and chief of the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī \( yin-li shih-fu \) s give valedictory addresses containing words of advice and good wishes. The ordination comes to an end in the early afternoon, as newly ordained monks and nuns stream out of the monastery to return to their own home temples, bearing in mind the often-repeated caution, "Don't think you have any qualifications yet; all you have got is the Precepts." The transmission of the precepts represents the permission to practise as a monastic and the ratification of an aspiration to do so, and armed with a shining set of precepts and the rest of their lives ahead of them, the new monastics are just beginning on their committed spiritual life.

3 THE LIFE OF A NUN: HSIAH-KUANG TEMPLE

When I first asked my Precepts Master, Venerable \( (Chang-lao) \) Wu-ming, which temple I should study, he immediately suggested Hsiang-kuang Temple. He told me that the nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple keep Vinaya discipline very strongly, that they study well and contribute many beneficial activities to Buddhist society in Taiwan. He described the nunnery as being a good example of a nuns' temple and well-known throughout Taiwan for its monastic discipline and religious education programs. He even kindly arranged my

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\( ^{54} \) The system of granting ordination certificates \( (tu-tieh \ or \ chieh-tieh) \) was inaugurated in 747 CE by Emperor Hsüan-tsung in order to restrict the number of monks and nuns entering the monastic order, however in more recent times the granting of ordination certificates has a positive connotation. See Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 223-4, for a full description of Hsüan-tsung's regulatory measures against Buddhism.
first visit to Hsiang-kuang Temple so that my purpose would be clear to the abbess, Wu-yin Fa-shih, and so that she knew I had the support of Venerable Wu-ming.

I stepped out of the train at Chiayi in Taiwan’s south-west in August 1995 on my first visit to Hsiang-kuang Temple and was immediately enveloped in a blanket of steamy heat, which was only relieved by the nunnery’s air-conditioned car which had been brought to the station to meet me. We left the busy city of Chiayi behind and drove for about half an hour through rural Chiayi county before entering the nunnery gates and pulling up in front of an old, ornate temple building. The nunnery is surrounded on three sides by luxuriant vegetation which threatens to engulf the buildings with huge-leaved tropical plants and clambering vines. Tall palm trees, vividly green, rise up the steep hill behind the nunnery. The din of insects is almost deafening.

There has been religious activity on the site of the present Hsiang-kuang Temple for over 120 years. In the second year of the Kuang-hsü period of the Ch’ing Dynasty (1877), an influential local family had acquired an ancient statue of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva from China. Because they believed this statue to possess prophetic powers and to answer the prayers of devotees, they wanted to put it in a public place so local people could have access to it. In this way the first wooden temple structure was built to house Kuan-yin and was called Yü-shan Yen, Jade Mountain Crag. Thirty years later a strong earthquake destroyed the shrine building and the people collected money to rebuild it, this time in stone. The temple was renamed Chin-lan Ssu, Golden Orchid Temple, and became the religious centre for more than twelve local villages.

In 1943, another earthquake destroyed the temple completely. This time, in the words of the local story, “the incense, from which plumes of fragrant smoke had constantly risen,
no longer burned." 55 Nobody visited the temple and its ruins became the domain of chickens and pigs which foraged among the stones and long grass. The statue of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva had been removed and took turns gracing the village people’s homes. Twenty-six years later a group of local elders felt compelled to establish a new temple and they put great effort into forming a committee and gathering money to construct a steel-reinforced temple building.

Three years later, in 1972, the main Buddha Hall was completed and in 1973 it was registered by the government as a Buddhist temple. 56 The local worshippers believed that in order to imbue the temple with power and authenticity, Dharma Masters should be invited. After some strong persuasion the bhikṣuṇī, Hsin-chih Fa-shih, moved by the determination of the people, agreed to leave her retreat in Kaohsiung and assume leadership of the new temple which at that time consisted of a simple shrine hall and dormitory building. Within one year she was enthroned as the first abbess and took on the full responsibility for the care and administration of the property. In 1975, with the agreement of the local people, she changed the temple name to Hsiang-kuang Temple.

Again in the words of the story, “although the building was austere, she carried out her Dharma teaching diligently. She vowed to light the incense for the Bodhisattva, as she believed that it is up to each individual to spread Buddha’s teaching dependent upon their own efforts.” She was convinced that the place would only become a real abode of practice if its occupants practised resolutely, and little by little she began to introduce

55 Hsiang-kuang ni-seng-t’uan shih-erh chou nien t’e k’an (Hsiang-kuang chuang-yen tsa-chih she, 1992), pp. 96-98.
56 Although it was built to be a Buddhist temple, in order to please the local people this Buddha Hall still retained the external Taoist embellishments which had ornamented the original buildings. Its interior is Buddhist in style.
Buddhism to increasing numbers of young people. She also gradually bought back the land which once belonged to the original temple but which had long been lost, and she tamed the neglected grounds and created beautiful gardens.

Because many young women came to Hsiang-kuang Temple to become nuns, the original dormitory building became inadequate and Hsin-chih Fa-shih began the construction of two large wings which would form a courtyard before the main Buddha Hall. In 1977, respecting the ability and greater vigour of other younger nuns, she stepped aside and invited Wu-yin Fa-shih, who had only just returned from Hawaii, to accept the position as Hsiang-kuang Temple’s second abbess. By 1991, the east and west dormitory wings were also insufficient, and second wings behind them were constructed. In 1995, the number of bhikṣuṇīs exceeded 100 with an additional nine novices and two hsin-che. 57

It has always been a policy of Hsiang-kuang Temple to be strictly a centre for Buddhist cultivation and study, so to avoid the sight-seeing tours which bring patronage to some other temples, Hsin-chih Fa-shih declared that no graves or cremation stupas would be built and no large public ceremonies (fa-hui) would be held. Wu-yin Fa-shih also takes Samgha education very seriously and created Hsiang-kuang Bhikṣuṇī Institute (Hsiang-kuang ni-chung fo-hsüeh-yüan) and a research centre to investigate and develop an education system for a Samgha that would be better equipped to function in the

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57 Hsin-che are laywomen living in the temple who have undertaken certain disciplines and are committed to an organised program preparing them for ordination. Their position in the monastic hierarchy is equivalent to the postulant in Christian nunneries. Kenneth Ch’en describes the reasons for the establishment of the stage of ‘postulant’ in mainland China. Although it is not known exactly when it was established, it was in existence during the Sung dynasty, set up because of the belief that a candidate could not immediately become a novice without a period of training to prepare him/her. The postulant does not shave her head, but follows the five precepts (Kenneth Ch’en, Buddhism in China, p. 245). Robert E. Buswell, Jr. also refers to the hsin-che in his book The Zen Monastic Experience (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ., 1992). He states that the Korean monk also undertakes a six-month period as a postulant (Korean: haengja), during which time he is required to learn the basics of monastic life and discipline (p. 69).
contemporary world than one which had received only a traditional education.

During Wu-yin Fa-shih’s own Buddhist monastic training in the 1960s, she became aware of the generally poor situation of nuns in Taiwan, who very often did little more than manual agricultural work, daily religious services and death rituals for the lay community. As a result she developed strong and well-defined views on Buddhist monastic education and has become the driving force in establishing the above-mentioned well-known and respected Bhikṣuṇī Institute, which has already produced over eighty bhikṣuṇī graduates who are proficient in various fields of secular expertise and are qualified to teach the Dharma and lead the Buddhist lay community. The many nuns’ communities in Taiwan emphasise different aspects of Buddhist monastic life such as study, meditation, ritual, prayer, retreat and community work, but they accept one another’s aims, and within the general pattern of nuns’ temples, Hsiang-kuang Temple is highly respected for its academic emphasis and its leaning towards study, teaching and research.

Wu-yin Fa-shih’s qualities have combined to create a successful and popular nunnery where bhikṣuṇīs can become fully trained in all aspects of religious education and monastic life and can learn to become teachers, educators and leaders in their own right. Her inspirational leadership of Hsiang-kuang Ssu has extended to the establishment of three institutes in southern Taiwan for the education of the public by Hsiang-kuang Bhikṣuṇī Institute graduates. She has recently begun devoting most of her time to the deanship of the umbrella organisation, known in English as the Luminary International Bhikṣuṇī Society, which embraces the temple and all the institutes. In 1992, Ming-chia

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58 Hsiang-kuang ni-seng t’uan.
Fa-shih assumed leadership of Hsiang-kuang Ssu as prioress.

The temple has been undergoing great expansion. When I arrived for my second visit in 1996, the views of distant misty blue mountains which I had seen on my previous visit were obliterated by an enormous traditional temple shell covered in bamboo scaffolding. Within one year, this concrete frame would support sweeping golden tiled roofs and red pillars, and would again offer mountain views from its top-storey meditation hall.

The present temple contains two halls of worship (ta-tien), one for graduate bhikṣūnis (chih-shih seng) and one for student bhikṣūnis (hsüeh-sheng, those ordained within the preceding five years and still studying in the Bhikṣūni Institute), novice nuns (Ch. sha-mi-ni; Skt. śrāmaneri) and postulants (hsing-che). Above the main temple hall is the library (tsang-ching lou) which houses over 18,000 books and cassette tapes. Also upstairs in the main temple building is the accommodation for the abbess and prioress.

Two dormitory systems separately house graduate and student bhikṣūnis, students sleeping twelve to a room and graduates sleeping three or four to a room. As no personal possessions are permitted in the dormitories, clothes are stored in separate cupboard-rooms which adjoin the dormitories and laundry area where commercial washing and drying machines are provided for cleaning the bhikṣūnis' robes. The big wood-fired temple stove heats water for evening baths in the rows of bathroom cubicles where special slippers are provided and mugs with toothbrushes are lined up on shelves. Notices exhort the nuns to conserve water, to leave the bathrooms tidy and clean and to use the slippers.

The large refectory is divided into three areas to feed visitors, graduate bhikṣūnis and student bhikṣūnis and is adjoined by the kitchen which is well appointed with commercial
Hsiang-kuang Temple

The old Taoist temple which became the original Buddha Hall at Hsiang-kuang Temple, Chiayi, Taiwan.

The interior of the original Buddha Hall.
Wu-yin Fa-shih, Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple, during an interview, October 1996.
Wu-yin Fa-shih (left), Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple and Dean of the Luminary International Bhiksuní Society, and Ming-chia Fa-shih, Hsiang-kuang Temple’s Prioress.

Wu-yin Fa-shih teaches a class in Buddhist philosophy at Hsiang-kuang Temple.

The head librarian and accomplished calligraphy instructor at Hsiang-kuang Temple guides a student during a calligraphy class.
Two bhiksunis talk to lay disciples in Hsiang-kuang Temple’s reception room.

Senior Vinaya instructor (left) and two nuns who work in the Guest Department of Hsiang-kuang Temple.

Two bhiksunis play the wooden fish and gong during morning and evening prayers.
refrigerators, big storage cupboards and sinks as well as the partially outdoor wood stove with provision for six enormous woks. A separate tea/coffee/snacks area provides extra refreshments for the nuns.59

The nunnery provides basic nursing care for nuns with a well-stocked sick bay for simple ailments. A stationery room supplies the nuns with all items required for study and a general storeroom provides toiletries and small items of clothing. The nunnery also provides the nuns with summer and winter robes with over 200 sets of each being supplied annually.

There are several classrooms, reading and recreational areas with tatami matting, cushions and reading desks, and retreat rooms where bhikṣunīs can enter solitary retreat (pi-kuan) for an agreed length of time. The visitors' reception room and office administration area is situated near the temple entrance and is beautifully furnished with Chinese traditional carved chairs and tables, framed calligraphy, reading matter, tea dispenser and much-needed fans. Guest accommodation is also offered to visitors with fully furnished rooms complete with all items typical of Chinese hospitality. When I was first shown to my room I noticed the attention to detail, which is an important part of the nuns' training, evident in the care taken to provide everything which visitors may need during their stay. From spare writing implements and stationery to snacks, hot water thermos, soap and towel, the room was carefully and thoughtfully equipped.

1. Organisation of the Nunnery

The nunnery is presided over by Wu-yin Fa-shih, the Head Abbess (fang-chang), and

59 The original kitchen and refectory were still in use into 1996, but in early 1997 the new Buddha Hall was nearing completion and its basement floor had already been opened as an enlarged and modern kitchen and dining area.
Dean (yüan-chang) of the Luminary International Bhikṣūṇī Society. Beneath her is the Abbess’s Office (fang-chang shih) and the Rules Committee (fa-wei hui), which oversee the institutes, the branch temple in Kaohsiung, the Publishing Department and Hsiang-kuang Ssu. Within the entire structure, Hsiang-kuang Ssu is independent, both economically and administratively, and has its own prioress (chu-ch’ih), Ming-chia Fashih.

Beneath her office is the Administrative Department of Hsiang-kuang Ssu (chien-yüan-shih), controlling the operation of the other four departments into which the temple is divided. Each of the five departments is headed by one or two bhikṣūṇis, while the daily affairs of each are overseen by a number of others. Between them, these five departments attend to the needs and tasks of the entire nunnery. Because few Taiwanese temples follow the strict ch’an tradition of the enclosed Meditation Hall as was the case in many mainland Chinese temples, the organisation of departments deviates in part from the system traditionally used on mainland China, however the basic form remains the same. When a large number of people live together as a close community, structure and rules are required to maintain order, and yet here there is no feeling of enforced

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60 In The Practice of Chinese Buddhism: 1900-1950, (pp. 8-31), Holmes Welch describes four departments into which the Buddhist monastery is traditionally divided: the Meditation Hall (ch’an-t’ang), the Guest Department (k’o-t’ang), the Business Office (k’u-fang) and the Sacristy (i-po-liao). Of these four, the Meditation Hall was considered the most important in monasteries which had one.

61 Buddhist monasticism is by nature a community undertaking, as the bhikṣu and bhikṣūṇi precepts clearly indicate, however in addition to the Prātimokṣa, Chinese temples observe extra sets of rules formulated in consideration of local customs and situations (sui-fang p’i-ni). The majority of present-day Chinese temples also adhere to some version of the Ch’ing-kuei, or Pure Rule, which govern, among other things, organisation, rules of conduct, required ceremonies and acts, abbot’s duties, general offices and monastic regulations in the daily operation of Ch’an monasteries. The earliest surviving comprehensive Ching-kuei is that compiled by Sung Dynasty monk, Tsung-tse, in 1103. See Yifa, “The Rules of Purity for the Ch’an Monastery: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qingguer” (PhD thesis, University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1996), p. 76.
regimentation, no heavy mantle of control. The bhikṣuṇīs respect their temple, its
organisational and hierarchical structure and each other and they cheerfully adhere to the
principles and guidelines laid down by the nunnery. This is, after all, a life that they have
chosen and which they could leave, if they wished.

Because each bhikṣuṇī spends time working in all the departments, they all have a
thorough understanding of the particular purpose and function of each department in the
smooth operation of the nunnery. Furthermore, they benefit and develop from the
activities and tasks demanded by the various departments and finally emerge as well-
trained individuals, some of whom will ultimately head a nunnery themselves.

The first department is the Reception or Guest Department (k'o-t'ang or fa-wu-tsu) which is managed by five nuns, one of whom is in charge (tsu-chang). The principal
responsibility of this department is to see to the comfort and well-being of nunnery
guests, whether they be lay visitors, visiting bhikṣuṇīs, eminent members of the
community or high masters.

It is clear that working in this department trains and refines the bhikṣuṇī to consider
others' needs and dispositions and to willingly serve anybody who requires attention,
regardless of their status. The nuns in the Reception Department are a visitor's first
contact with the nunnery and they demonstrate a caring and sensitive demeanour whether
they are cleaning rooms, talking to lay visitors in the reception room, serving tea to guests
or showing people around the nunnery.

While I was staying at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, I had the opportunity to observe the reception
nuns interacting with many lay people, both from local villages and from the city, with
visiting bhikṣuṇīs, with an abbot and his entourage from Taipei, with the labourers who were building the new temple, with children, with the best-known calligrapher in Taiwan who stayed at the temple for a few days to complete commissioned artwork, with a visiting Japanese professor who gave a series of lectures on Vinaya history, and with a mentally unstable local woman. I did not observe any signs of discrimination or favouritism, of weariness or irritation. Instead, I was keenly aware of a sense of compassion and concern for beings. It is perhaps training in the Reception Department which offers the greatest opportunity for the development of equanimity, for the nuns must be continually prepared to extend whatever help is needed to whoever arrives at the temple.

The second department is the Stores Department (k’u-fang-tsu). This section is managed by two nuns and takes care of the daily requirements of the nunnery and nuns. The supply of robes, medicine, toiletries, stationery, food and transport and travel arrangements are controlled by this department. As there is no longer a separate Shrine Department (ta-tien-tsu) in this temple, the upkeep and maintenance of the shrine halls, the supply of offerings and ritual needs for daily worship, ch’ an meditation sessions and special religious activities are included in the k’u-fang-tsu.

Nuns develop a sense of responsibility while working in this department as well as gaining a practical training in bookkeeping, order and supply and stores management. The conventional attitude of taking care solely of oneself is replaced by a community-oriented spirit of sharing and caring. The nuns are proud of their community and regard it
as their only home. When I first heard one nun refer to another nun as ‘my sister’, I thought they must have been siblings, but I quickly realised that they all refer to each other in that way.

The third department, Youth and Student Affairs (hui ch’ing hsüeh-yüan), is managed by two nuns and coordinates teaching, support and advice to Taiwan’s Buddhist youth. Hsiang-kuang Temple’s policy and mission is that Buddhism in modern times needs to reach the young and the educated and be supported by them. This is seen as one way to influence the future of society for the better and to enhance the quality of both the Buddhists and Buddhism in Taiwan. It is the responsibility of those nuns in the Youth and Student Affairs Department to devise ways to appeal to Taiwan’s youth, by organising activities, camps, classes and discussion groups throughout the year. Their work also gives them experience in teaching Buddhism, trains them to organise relevant and useful courses and interact with lay youth. This department has recently been moved to the Taipei city Institute to be more in touch with young people.

The fourth department, the Construction Department (kung-ch’eng-tsu), has been temporarily created to oversee construction of the new temple. Three nuns manage this department, which will be dissolved at the conclusion of the current building program.

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62 The nuns are keen to uphold the Six Purposes of the Establishment of the Samgha (liu chien seng te i-i), all of which clearly call for harmonious relations between Samgha members, namely:

- Harmony in the body (shen ho kung chu) - living together peacefully
- Harmony in oral communication (speech) (k’ou ho wu cheng) - no disputes
- Harmony in the mind (i ho t’ung yüeh) - appreciating and supporting each other
- Harmony in the precepts (chieh ho t’ung tsun) - observing the same rules
- Harmony in views (chien ho t’ung chieh) - sharing the same beliefs
- Harmony in welfare (li ho t’ung chün) - enjoying benefits in equality

The Bhikṣuṇī Prātimokṣa of Dharmaguptaka: Supplementary Materials (Ṣu fen pi-ch’iu-ni chieh pu ch’ung chiao ts’ai), compiled by Venerable Wu-yin and Venerable Chien-han (Gaya Foundation, Chiayi, Taiwan, 1996), p.3.
The Administration Department (chien-yüan shih) is run by two nuns whose duties include the paperwork for the abbess, the preparation of financial planning and budget estimates, the maintenance of the bhikṣuṇīs’ records, the coordination of the annual calendar of events and activities with the lay community and the supervision of the other four departments. The nuns in this department do the necessary secretarial work and oversee the practical side of the nunnery’s general operation. They are also in charge of work allocation and, following an expression of interest in certain work by a resident nun, they carry out discussions with her and give an initial evaluation of her suitability.

The five departments are staffed by graduate bhikṣuṇīs who have already passed through the five-year Bhikṣuṇī Institute training program. Graduate bhikṣuṇīs are also encouraged to creatively pursue a career in the temple and are given every assistance by the abbess in their further studies, even if they need to travel overseas. Among Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s senior nuns are ones skilled in nursing, librarianship, editorial work, publishing, computer operation, accountancy and business management, teaching and Buddhist research, and social work. Many to whom I spoke said that they would never have discovered their particular talent or interest if the abbess had not pointed it out to them and then set them on the path to explore and train in it.

Student bhikṣuṇīs (when they are not attending the rigorous Institute training program which is their main focus of activity) and novices perform different sets of duties which are rotated among them for between one to three months. All the nuns do general temple jobs each morning, such as sweeping, polishing and gardening, as part of temple life and the temple ethic of work and service. They appeared to me to show cheerful and diligent attitudes, accepting difficult physical and external conditions such as excessive heat or
their own fatigue. Clearly, they use the work periods as a time for developing patience and selflessness. As I crossed the courtyard one early morning after breakfast before the day became hot, I heard a nun singing to herself as she swept. Her voice was pure as she chanted the lyrical mu k’ou-chung chieh, the gāṭhā of evening salutation.

The novices do the physical and repetitious duties of the nunnery. They manage the shrine, the kitchen and the laundry exclusively: these three areas are their domain and their initial training-ground. Each novice group is led by a more senior novice or occasionally by a bhikṣṇi. Two novices are in charge of the shrine hall, the duties of which include the early morning wake-up call on the wooden clapper (pan) and daily cleaning of the entire hall involving piling up the cushions and mopping the marble floor from end to end, polishing the shrine itself, arranging the offerings and lighting incense and lights. Novices also perform morning and evening ritual ringing of the great bell and drum (ta chung, ta ku) hanging on each side of the temple door.

Four novices manage the kitchen (ta-liao), cooking all the meals, serving (hsing-t’ang) the student bhikṣṇīs who eat in strict silence, putting out the graduate bhikṣṇīs’ and lay-people’s food in their respective dining areas, lighting and maintaining the wood fires and overseeing food supplies. While serving the bhikṣṇīs, the novice is taught to be observant and thoughtful, anticipating their needs and acting cheerfully and attentively at all times. She learns, by daily exposure to it, the traditional temple eating ritual enacted by the student bhikṣṇīs until they graduate, and this contributes to her preparation and readiness for receiving ordination as a bhikṣṇī herself. It is during her time as a kitchen-worker that the novice also learns the complex art of traditional vegetarian temple cooking, turning myriad vegetables, vines, flowers, grains and tou-fu into tasty and
wholesome dishes.

Four novices also manage the laundry, operating the large commercial washing machines and dryers, mending, ironing, folding and putting away the robes of student and graduate bhikṣuṇis. The minimum of two years which a novice spends studying, training and mentally preparing herself for bhikṣuṇī ordination is regarded as a period of purification and self-investigation. The menial nature of many of the chores tests her mettle and her commitment to a life of discipline and adherence to a set code of precepts and ethics.

Apart from the straightforward functional organisation of Hsiang-kuang Ssu into departments and their workers, the nuns are ranked according to their level of ordination as novice or bhikṣuṇī and, within the bhikṣuṇī group, according to their date of ordination. However, I perceived no formidable atmosphere of constraint binding the nuns to a strictly enforced hierarchical protocol. All the nuns to whom I spoke respect and admire the two abbesses and appear to genuinely like them as spiritual friends and companions and as people whom they trust and to whom they can turn in times of crisis or religious predicament.

Within the overall organisation of the Luminary International Bhikṣuṇī Society the nunnery is autonomous, and it also operates independently and free of organisational and financial control from outside monasteries or other nunneries. Furthermore, within Taiwan, Hsiang-kuang Ssu is regarded as a model nunnery, successfully and innovatively implementing the far-sighted and comprehensive views on monastic education and life which the successive abbesses have developed, and which will be described in detail in Section II.3.4, Religious Education. Buddhist scholar, Li Yü-chen, who has conducted field-work in many Taiwanese nunneries, expressed her view that Hsiang-kuang Ssu is
ahead of its time, an exemplary nunnery pointing a direction which many other nunneries may follow in the future.63

Wu-yin Fa-shih’s principal duties revolve around the deanship of the three Buddhist Institutes and the Bhikṣunī Institute located at Hsiang-kuang Ssu. Although many decisions do not have to be made by her as the chu-ch’ih is fully authorised as prioress to direct daily operations, she is the final authority and must, for example, approve the expenditure of large amounts of money. She also attends monthly meetings to discuss the administration of Hsiang-kuang Ssu and its Institutes and she is currently involved in the decision-making process for the temple construction project.

As Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s first abbess, Hsin-chih Fa-shih, originally invited Wu-yin Fa-shih to assume leadership of the nunnery, her office of ‘Fang-chang’ is transferrable and one from which she can formally resign. The title of ‘Shih-fu’ by which she is addressed, is bestowed by others in recognition of her spiritual attainment. The duties of both Wu-yin Fa-shih and Ming-chia Fa-shih include giving teaching, spiritual guidance, support and advice to nuns, hsing-che and laywomen aspiring to receive ordination. They are accessible and are fully qualified both by experience and training to counsel and direct those seeking spiritual assistance or secular direction. They maintain a visible profile within the nunnery and with a firm, yet gentle, hand they instil a sense of stability and order. Their daily presence conveys approachability to anyone with a need.

In addition, Ming-chia Fa-shih in her capacity as prioress also plays a leading role in the administration and financial affairs of the nunnery. She coordinates the nunnery’s activities in the area of human resources - directing personnel in their duties and

63 Personal communication, Taipei, December, 1998.
overseeing Dharma activities with the lay community. She manages the nunnery’s radio and media programs, directs the two Institutes at Kaohsiung and Chiayi city and Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s overseas branch temple in Seattle, and is in charge of Vinaya at Hsiang-kuang Bhikṣunī Institute. Finally, she gives support to Wu-yin Fa-shih and, in her own words, she is “like a bridge to communicate between the upper and the lower” conveying information from the fang-chang to the nuns and back.

Both Wu-yin Fa-shih and Ming-chia Fa-shih insist on being one of the nuns and not removed from them. Unless they are conducting a ritual or ceremony, they wear robes of the same style and colour as the other nuns and when they are standing in a group, they are at first indistinguishable. It is their demeanour and bearing that immediately define them as women in authority, as bhikṣunīs with a special quality. Ming-chia Fa-shih says of Wu-yin Fa-shih that her wisdom is very great in all aspects of monastic life: administration, education, Dharma activities and meditation, and that she does not focus on only one aspect as many abbesses do.

As an institution supporting over 100 permanent members, Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s financial needs are considerable despite the frugality of the nuns themselves, who are known throughout Taiwan for their simple life and few personal requirements. In addition to the obvious expenses for food, robes, general supplies, educational materials, maintenance and upkeep, there are numerous hidden costs involved in the operation of the

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64 During such events, they wear a yellow hai-ch’ing (formal ceremonial gown with graceful butterfly sleeves) and a red chia-sha (25-patched robe); the rest of the nuns wear a black hai-ch’ing and a brown chia-sha at all ceremonies.
65 Interview conducted at Hsiang-kuang Ssu in October, 1995.
66 Some monastic establishments in Taiwan provide a greater degree of comfort for the nuns or monks compared to Hsiang-kuang Ssu. Those monastics often occupy single rooms, enjoy air-conditioning in the summer and prepare more numerous and elaborate dishes.
temple. One such substantial expense is Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s policy of taking out health and disability insurance for each nun.

Although it is tax exempt, the temple receives no financial support from the government and relies almost entirely on the generosity and support of the Buddhist lay community with whom an active and constructive reciprocal relationship is maintained. In addition to educating the Buddhist public in the institutes, Hsiang-kuang Ssu organises two major Dharma activity sessions each year which are very well attended and supported. It also provides camps throughout the year for students, children and adults, and weekend activities at the temple. For special undertakings, such as the current construction project, an appeal is made to the lay community by word of mouth and through Buddhist publications, and sometimes religious and educational foundations also make donations for these purposes.

Visitors and worshippers arrive daily to pay their respects in the temple hall, to offer incense and to pray. Many of them stay and talk to the nuns and are served lunch. In return they make offerings of money and gifts in kind. A proportion of the food is donated by farmers and shopkeepers. Volunteer lay workers help wash vegetables, prepare lunch, clean the dishes and work in the office. The temple is a haven for these Buddhist disciples, who evidently enjoy the peaceful atmosphere and the kindness and compassion of the nuns.

2. Joining the Community and Daily Life at Hsiang-kuang Temple

To enter and be accepted at Hsiang-kuang Ssu as a permanent member is not easy. Furthermore, with its strong emphasis on education and teaching, it is not ideal for all
nuns. A nun already fully ordained who wishes to live at the temple is accepted provisionally for up to a year while her behaviour, mind and spirit, and the ease with which she integrates into the temple's daily life are observed. Following this, all Hsiang-kuang Ssu members including the abbess, meet to discuss her permanent acceptance into the Sangha community, while she herself weighs up its suitability for her temperament. Most nuns who choose to stay at Hsiang-kuang Ssu are inclined towards academic study or Buddhist research, although there are those who have strong devotional and work-oriented leanings.

After a nun has been accepted, she is then given a new religious name to accord with the Buddhist lineage to which the temple belongs. Hsiang-kuang Ssu follows the Lin-chi Ch'an school in which disciples are named according to a 32-character prayer. Each one of these characters is used in turn for the first character of the disciples' names in a given generation. The cycle can be endlessly repeated. Presently four characters, ming, hsin, chien and hsing, are in use, which together bear the meaning 'clarify the mind, the nature will be perceived'. The names of nuns in the current generation begin with the character 'chien', which means 'to see' or 'to perceive', and nuns in the next generation will be given names which begin with 'hsing'.

Laywomen intending to take ordination may also apply to join the community. A woman who wishes to receive ordination as a nun must first prove to herself and the community that she is sincere and committed. Furthermore, when she joins, she must be under 35 years old and unmarried, in accordance with the policy of the temple. She might have

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67 The tradition of members of a temple or disciples of a master being given the same first character in their Dharma name (fa-ming) in accordance with their particular lineage is practised widely throughout Taiwan.
learnt of the temple's existence from Hsiang-kuang Ssu's institutes or from university and college Buddhist societies where bhikṣunīs from Hsiang-kuang Ssu have taught, or she might have heard of its reputation and be previously unconnected with the temple.

Having obtained the temple's permission to embark on the path to full ordination under its jurisdiction and auspices and under the strict guidance and watchful eye of the abbess, a woman enters the temple as a lay person (chū-shih) who has at the very least taken formal refuge in the Triple Jewel (kuei-i san-pao), but who has by this stage usually received the five precepts (wu-chieh) as well. If she has received the five precepts and bodhisattva precepts (p'u-sa chieh), she may wear the formal black robe (hai-ch'ing) and plain brown robe (li-ch'an-i) to ceremonies.

This initial step lasts at least six months, during which time the chū-shih attends morning and evening prayers, performs temple duties and closely observes and endeavours to emulate the deportment and discipline of a nun. In addition, she begins to train her mind in the way of a nun and examines her reasons and motivation for wishing to receive ordination. After an acceptable period of such self-examination and accustomisation to temple life, and if she has demonstrated that her inclinations are genuine and that her motivations are unquestionable, she is accepted by a meeting of the temple to take the next step on the long path to full ordination - that of postulant or hsing-che.

The hsing-che must cut her hair short and wear a uniform consisting of blue trousers and a grey shirt. She may also wear the black and brown ceremonial robes and is required to attend morning and evening chanting sessions and take part in temple duties. As well as joining a selection of classes at the Bhikṣunī Institute, there is also a program of education especially designed for the hsing-che and which includes instruction in the
reasons and purpose for leaving the home life, the discipline and life of a nun, rules of community and temple life and the history of the Buddhist Samgha. This will be dealt with more fully in Section II.3.4, Religious Education.

For at least a further six months the hsin~che trains, studies and prepares for the next brief stage, that of ‘leaving the home life’ (ch’u-chia). While staying at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, I often observed the two hsin~che who were currently in training, and it was clear that they took the whole process very seriously and in their efforts to meet the level of discipline required, they almost exaggerated their actions with deliberation and care. Each day they spent several hours sitting in the shrine hall in meditation or bowing and making extra offerings of incense. They ate their meals in silence and rarely conversed at other times. I detected a single-minded sense of purpose in their attitudes. It was clear that they were already well along the way to refining their behaviour and adapting to the temple situation.

At the time of leaving the home life, which is the stage before novice (sha-mi-ni) ordination, the head is shaved. Permission is usually sought from the candidate’s parents and the date is generally planned in advance so that this period can be quickly followed by novice ordination to enable the new sha-mi-ni to begin formal studies at the Institute at the right time of the year. Novice ordination is given by the abbesses, although any two senior bhikṣunis ordained for more than twelve years are qualified to do so. The ceremony takes about two or three hours and formally admits the sha-mi-ni from that moment on into what should be a firm commitment and loyalty to the sanctity of

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68 ‘Leaving the home life’ is a very apt term to describe the process of renouncing the life of a householder and all the involvements it necessarily demands. The term also assumes an understanding on the part of the person that the ‘home life’ is filled with distractions and with situations unconducive to uninterrupted commitment to the monastic way of life.
ordination.

In 1996, there were two brand new sha-mi-ni at the temple, one of whom I had known the previous year as a hsing-che. They shone with their newly-acquired sense of responsibility and accomplishment, taking their obligations to heart and looking pressed and crisp in their new robes. Whenever I saw them, they were immersed in the temple’s prescribed daily routine for novices, folding robes, ringing bells, cooking and serving food or attending classes. One sha-mi-ni in particular who had shared some thoughts with me the previous year when she was still a hsing-che, now expressed to me her joy and relief at having successfully reached novicehood.

At least two years of routine hard work, attention to discipline, study and service prepare the novice for the final step of full ordination as a bhikṣunī for which she is presented by the abbess herself who, having ascertained the candidate’s readiness, must sign her application form (see Appendix 2) and send her prepared with all requisites to the ordination platform (see Section II.2, above). On her return to the temple, the student bhikṣunī begins the third year of the Institute education program (described in Section II.3.4) and enters the first of her five years as a student bhikṣunī. During these formative and vital five years, the student bhikṣunī consolidates the training she received at her ordination, following a more austere and regimented routine than the graduate bhikṣunīs above her. This long period of further education and training for ordained nuns is a special feature of Hsiang-kuang Ssu.

Catriona Clear describes the purpose of the three-stage process of a nun’s induction into monastic orders in the Catholic church and some of the features of those stages, which correspond to a certain extent with those found in Chinese Buddhist monasticism:
The postulant lived in the convent and took part, to a certain extent, in the day-to-day routine of work and prayer. She wore either her own clothes or plain, modest dress supplied by the convent... This trial period rarely lasted more than a year; six months or less was the normal duration. ... The reception of a postulant into the convent was marked by an elaborate ceremony involving the adoption of a religious name, and the donning of the religious habit (usually with a minor modification to distinguish the novice from the professed nun). Temporary vows were taken at this stage, and the novice then spent a year, at least... learning about the religious life, and preparing herself for final profession. ... The novice was free to leave the convent at any time, but final vows, taken at the end of novitiate, were binding...69

Hsiang-kuang Ssu student bhikṣunīs attend four classes in two sessions daily and chant their morning and evening recitations separately from graduate bhikṣunīs. They also eat their morning and midday meal in silence and in strict accordance with the traditional kuo-t'ang ritual, walking in line with downcast eyes to the refectory dressed in formal hai-ch'ing and chia-sha. Chanting the confession liturgy (shang-kung) and the food offering chant (lin-ch'ai), and making the twice daily rice-grain offering to the hungry ghosts (e-kuei), they eat from their begging bowls in a highly stylised and traditional manner, using accepted signs and gestures to ask for refills or other needs. The sense of hierarchy and the awareness of each level of attainment is clearly evident in the manner in which nuns relate to each other. The unforced respect which is extended a graduate bhikṣuni and the sisterly support which she returns demonstrated to me time and again the understanding the nuns have gained of monastic life and of Vinaya.

The nuns' life revolves around a daily schedule of prayer, study, work, meditation, service and recreation. The structure of their lives is carefully formulated to offer the best opportunity for them to refine themselves according to Buddhist discipline without distraction, to train their minds to become free of delusion and to follow their chosen path to enlightenment. It also provides for attention to the practical matters of temple

69 Catriona Clear, op. cit., p. 69.
organisation and function.

This is the daily schedule which is followed on ordinary days throughout the year. It is adjusted to accommodate Buddhist anniversary days, festivals, special activities and also for the twice-monthly recitation of bhikṣuṇī (shuo-chieh) and bodhisattva (shuo p’u-sa chieh) precepts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>Commencement of bell (ta-chung) followed by great drum (ta-ku) and wooden clapper (pan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>Rise and wash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.30-5.30</td>
<td>Morning prayer chanting (chao-shih k’o sung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>Breakfast (tsao-ts’an) including the kuo-t’ang ritual</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>General temple chores - cleaning, sweeping, polishing, gardening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.40-10.20</td>
<td>Classes for student bhikṣuṇīs at the Institute (three classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.20</td>
<td>Lunch (chung-fan) including the kuo-t’ang ritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00-2.00</td>
<td>Rest (hsiu-hsi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00-4.30</td>
<td>Classes for student bhikṣuṇīs (two classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>Evening food (yao-shih)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>Evening prayer recitation (mu-shih k’o sung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00-7.40</td>
<td>Chanting session for graduate bhikṣuṇīs, including reading from</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 During this time and also the afternoon classes from 2-4.30, graduate bhikṣuṇīs attend to their regular work in the nunnery. Novices attend their own classes. The hsing-che participate in some classes which are relevant to their situation.

71 As evening meals are proscribed within the Pratimokṣa, evening food is traditionally referred to as ‘medicine’ and consists of a very limited choice of light food. Eating in the evening is an individual decision, and some temples only serve liquid refreshments at this time, such as tou-chiang (soy milk) or a light soup. Food is offered at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, because the nuns work extremely hard during the day and would otherwise experience an unhealthy degree of hunger.
the Abhidharma and Sūtras

9.00 Great drum followed by the bell and wooden clapper signalling the beginning of great silence (an pan) which continues until the end of the following morning prayers.

Many nuns study or sit in meditation for up to an hour, but the consistently demanding daily routine ensures that most lights are off by 10.00 pm.

On the lunar eighth and twenty-third, the nuns recite the bodhisattva precepts and on the fifteenth and twenty-ninth bhikṣuṇī precepts are recited at 7.30 pm which necessitates moving the evening prayers forward to 4.30 pm. On these days all nuns shave each other’s heads, chant extra morning prayers including the lyrical prostration chant (pai yüan) and recite special mantras. There is a tangible atmosphere of celebration as these days remind the nuns of their commitment and purpose in being a member of the monastic community established by the Buddha. Their adherence to the traditional observances of an ordained being serves to reinforce their dedication to the spiritual path and their recognition of its continuing usefulness and validity.

Certain days of the lunar calendar are also observed as being important Buddhist anniversary days. The nuns at Hsiang-kuang Ssu celebrate the following:

- the first day of the first month - anniversary day of Maitreya Buddha
- the fifteenth day of the second month - Nirvāṇa-day of Lord Buddha
- the nineteenth day of the second month - anniversary day of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva
- the eighth day of the fourth month - birthday of Lord Buddha
- the nineteenth day of the sixth month - Nirvāṇa-day of Avalokiteśvara
Bodhisattva

- the thirtieth day of the seventh month - anniversary day of Ti-tsang Bodhisattva
- the seventeenth day of the eleventh month - anniversary day of Amitābha Buddha
- the eighth day of the twelfth month - Enlightenment day of Lord Buddha

The life at Hsiang-kuang Ssu is extremely rigorous and intense, allowing little time for privacy or relaxation, and yet the majority of the nuns appear to thrive on it. Although it is clear that each nun is an individual, with her own particular talents, aspirations and difficulties, a culture of mutual support and respect encourages the nuns to watch out for and take care of each other. There is one nun who used to be a nurse, and she has taken it upon herself to supervise the physical wellbeing of every nun. Once a week she hands out enormous brown vitamin tablets and this ritual has become a source of great amusement for everyone.

The nuns want to learn and to develop themselves. All those with whom I had discussions expressed their contentment and joy at temple life and at having chosen the path of a nun. When I discussed the general attitude of diligence and enthusiasm which the nuns seem to possess, with one of the senior bhikṣunīs who is the Vinaya instructor for the novices, she said that, "the nuns want to purify their bodies and minds, and their wish is to serve and make a great contribution for the Buddha". She also told me that they all want to "study more, to be busy and to know many things". Laughingly, she added that they are so enthusiastic that they hurry to get up in the morning and they go to bed exhausted and fall asleep immediately. However, she cautioned that the nuns should keep a balance in their activities and devote equal amounts of time to meditation, study and work. Her main concern, and that of many of the nuns, appeared to be the temple's
strong emphasis on work and study which affords little time for group meditation and formal spiritual practice and which leaves many nuns too tired at the end of the long day to pursue their own personal meditation and practice.72

I discovered, however, that there is a purpose to the stress laid upon work and study and the very fact that some nuns are objecting to it and expressing a desire to meditate is proof that this strategy is succeeding. In November 1995 the nuns were taking part in an intensive ten-day meditation retreat for the first time, and the long years of temple work had clearly prepared them and made them want to meditate. Many nuns said they could hardly wait for the retreat to begin and were regarding it as an experiment to see if they could beneficially incorporate extended periods of meditation into the temple routine in addition to the two hours of ch'an meditation which is included in the evening recitation once a week.

The numerous activities and projects which the temple has undertaken necessitate a high level of energy and input from the nuns. Hsiang-kuang Ssu's diagrammatic annual diary of daily affairs and its workchart map out the projects in which it is involved, and the nun-power they demand. Projects include education, Buddhist cultural research and development, translation, media programs, publishing and social welfare (including work with disturbed youth offenders and prisoners). Within the category of education, the individual areas of nunnery administration, research and development, investigation into and development of teaching methods, Buddhist adult education, Samgha education and university student education are addressed.

As soon as breakfast is finished each morning, the graduate bhikṣuṇīs disappear to their

72 Interview at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
assigned work-stations all over the temple, and the public areas, courtyards and shrine-hall become almost deserted, except for the lay worshippers who begin to arrive with offerings of fruit, flowers and incense. Five nuns work in the reception area and another small group operate the administration office. Two or three nuns work in the library and several more carry out Buddhist research. Another nun heads the small editing team which produces the monthly magazine, Chuang-yen, issued by the temple. Nuns also work on special projects which the temple has undertaken. When I was at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, one nun was compiling a series of books on notable institutes of Buddhist monastic education throughout Taiwan. The temple is also involved in the translation into Chinese and publication of Buddhist books and has produced four already. In 1997, they were compiling a Dictionary of Vinaya.

Five senior bhikṣunīs teach Vinaya at the Institute and six others manage the operation of the three Buddhist colleges. The weekly radio program requires considered preparation as do the activities which the temple conducts for the local lay community and for the wider society. In addition, fifteen nuns live at the branch temple and institute in Kaohsiung, Purple Bamboo Grove Pure Abode (Tsu Chu-lin Ching-she), eight in the Chiayi city institute, An Hui Hsüeh-yüan, and two in Miao-li city’s Ting Hui Hsüeh-yüan in order to conduct Buddhist adult education programs for lay Buddhist students. 73

The graduate bhikṣunīs begin their daily work, the Hsiang-kuang Institute student bhikṣunīs present themselves for their first class of the morning and unless they too have a class, the novices start laundry and kitchen duties. The nuns appear to give all their actions and duties their concentrated attention. They have learned and understood that

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73 During 1997, the Taipei city centre, Yin-i Hsüeh-yüan, was also enlarged and beautifully refurbished. At least six nuns live there and conduct classes and activities for Taipei Buddhists.
concern for detail contributes to training in mindfulness and provides the opportunity to
develop it even while involved in seemingly prosaic activities. Even the way a nun passes
through a door is graceful and aware.

By the time a *hsing-che* becomes a bhikṣuṇī, she has had so much time and experience
training within the temple environment in the company of bhikṣuṇīs, that she possesses
dignity, mindfulness and confidence. The refined deportment and behaviour of a Chinese
bhikṣuṇī is unforced; the nuns at Hsiang-kuang Ssu often mentioned the word *chuang-
yen* to me as describing the manner and bearing to which a bhikṣuṇī aspires: the term
could be translated as solemn, stately, dignified, decorous or austere. When a bhikṣuṇī
walks, it is brisk and purposeful and yet controlled and free of flippant or extraneous
gestures. She is light-natured, light-bodied but also grounded and stable.74 She
manifests self-assurance, confidence in her outlook, joyfulness and an awareness of the
needs of others. If two bhikṣunīs or if an entire roomful of bhikṣunīs are conducting
chanting rituals, the level of commitment and the grace, beauty and dignity are equally
apparent.

The daily temple tasks are performed with no clatter, no rush but in a steady stream of
purposeful activity. The temple runs smoothly, as if automatically. At exactly the
prescribed times of day and night, bells or wooden clappers sound and bhikṣuṇīs gather
or begin new activities. The abbess does not need to intervene or enforce daily discipline
in order to keep the temple functioning. The nuns appear to want to behave like nuns and
keep the temple, their home, in well-maintained order. They have voluntarily chosen the
life of a nun, fully aware of its restrictions and obligations, and yet they show no sense of

74 Bhikṣuṇīs are taught to walk like the wind, to stand like a pine, to sit like a bell and to sleep like (in
the shape of) a bow. These are the four main physical deportments of an ordained person.
deprivation at the rigid routine and constant demands placed upon them. Their motivation is to purify their minds and live by the nuns’ precepts and their purpose is service and enlightenment.

Activities and obligations are not regarded as falling into distinctly religious, work-related or recreational categories. Because all activities are intended to be integrated into general temple life and are used as tools for self-development and travelling the path to enlightenment, cleaning becomes a Buddha-activity, cooking and serving food become an offering and t’ai-chi becomes an exercise in mindfulness. Opening and closing doors become opportunities for awareness; eating, walking and talking each assume a purposeful significance.

Buddhist education classes consume a large proportion of the day for most temple members. Morning and evening temple worship occupy an important place in temple life. The nuns are taught how to respect and maintain constant awareness of the Buddha. When they leave the temple, even for a short time, they first go to the shrine-hall and bow to Buddha; returning to the temple, their first act is to enter the shrine-hall to greet the Buddha. Even their spare time is utilised as an offering to the Buddha. The nuns have created a small oriental garden behind the temple with bodhi-trees, stone seats and pot plants which they tend with care. In addition to education and worship, service is the third important aspect of the nun’s life and of Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s raison d’être. Nuns are encouraged to cultivate and promote an active involvement in the human situation and to be readily available to those who seek their counsel.

Despite the nuns’ steadfast acceptance of discipline and the observance of procedure, there is also a little time set aside for real recreation, relaxation, laughing and talking.
There is a very human side to the community and one day when a group of nuns took me to a vegetarian restaurant in Chiayi city, one of them was delighted to see that her favourite dish was on the menu. Although such recreation is rather a luxury at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, nuns sometimes play basketball or go on outings to the countryside, but mostly they prefer to concentrate on other forms of relaxation which have a traditional connection with temple life, such as calligraphy, temple cooking, flower arrangement and learning to sew nuns’ robes.

I participated in calligraphy classes and was immediately aware of the respect with which the nuns treated the nun who was teaching them this traditional art. At other times she was their sister, but here in the classroom situation she became their teacher (*lao-shih*) and was addressed by them as such. She wore the long, formal robe (*ch’ang-shan*) which nuns generally use when teaching or lecturing, rather than the calf-length robe (*luo-han kua*) worn within the temple. She assumed an attitude of authority which her students instantly recognised and acceded to as she firmly grasped their hands with her own and guided them through the character strokes, or marked with red ink the course their hesitant strokes should have taken. I was also moved by the generous encouragement and good humour everyone extended to me, despite my awkward attempts to execute presentable characters.

The nuns sometimes make excursions to Taipei to visit museums, exhibitions or other temples; they take picnics in the mountains beyond Hsiang-kuang Ssu or go to vegetarian restaurants in the city. Occasionally they eat ice-cream. Whenever Wu-yin Fa-shih travels overseas for lecturing or teaching commitments, she takes several nuns with her and in 1994 a large group visited Europe where, they admitted to me, they had great
difficulties coping with European food.75

Opportunities for personal Buddhist practice and private meditation are limited and unless a nun requests to enter retreat at the temple, she must make do with what little time is available in the late evenings. This emphasis on work to the apparent detriment of personal practice may be seen as one weakness in the temple’s organisational program. Wu-yin Fa-shih, however, maintains that Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s program structure is flexible and may be adapted to fulfil the needs and wishes of the nuns. As they become more accustomed to extended annual periods of meditation, it will be incorporated into their daily routine.

It is precisely because the nuns understand the many aspects of the nun’s life and have been exposed to its rigours before ordination that there have been so few failures. In 25 years, only two nuns have left Hsiang-kuang Ssu. Although there is not a heavy disciplinary atmosphere shadowing the temple, it is clear that each nun is observing the many precepts, temple rules and routines. In my informal talks and formal interviews with many of the nuns, not one of them felt constrained or inhibited by the close nature of community living. Moreover, there is no apparent frustration at the lack of individual choice in matters that other people take for granted, such as what to eat and when to get up.76 Another reason for the small number of withdrawals is that no individual nun is

75 In 1995 Wu-yin Fa-shih and several of her nuns travelled to Bodh Gaya, India, to give instruction in Vinaya at a program organised by Western nuns of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This was the first time that a Chinese bhikṣuni has given teachings to nuns, both ethnic and Western, of Tibetan Buddhism and is another sign of the beginning of a beneficial connection between the two.

76 During my formal interviews, no nun expressed dissatisfaction with community living. They all recognise that living in a community is part of the monastic endeavour and that rules and discipline have been formulated purely to protect that endeavour. The worst complaint I encountered from a nun was that she disliked wearing the grey cloth socks which all nuns must wear in summer and winter when they leave the temple precincts.
making all the decisions, but that all follow pre-determined rules and routines which are formulated by the community as a whole and, when not fundamental to the established monastic discipline, can be examined and discussed by it if they are found to be unworkable.

The first impression of Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s nuns may be of a homogeneous group of grey-robed figures, but in time I discovered individuals with widely differing aspirations, opinions and preferences. I discovered women who have truly found their vocation and who are following it unwaveringly in all the disciplines and daily obligations which it demands.

3. Vows in Action: Temple Rule and Discipline

Hsiang-kuang Ssu is a modern nunnery housing modern, highly educated and versatile nuns who, in addition to the traditional Buddhist scriptures, utilise technology and advanced teaching methods in their pursuit of usefulness and service, and who utilise service in their pursuit of enlightenment. To function in and be of use to society the nuns must keep abreast of contemporary developments; it is also clear that some of the monastic precepts in their strict wording as contained in the Pratimoksa are out-dated and no longer suitable, or even useful for the most effective endeavours of the nuns, even though the sentiment and the reason which gave rise to their individual creation is enduringly relevant. Therefore, in accordance with Wu-yin Fa-shih’s philosophy on the teaching and implementation of the precepts, Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s nuns adhere to the spirit of the precepts, rather than the letter of them. She teaches Vinaya by explaining the purpose of monastic community and the scope and substance of the precepts and by emphasising the main prohibitions as a whole and including in them all the sub-precepts
subsumed under the same general subject.

There are many individual precepts occurring in other categories but falling within the general headings of the grave offences (Pārājika) of killing, sexual conduct, stealing, lying or refusing to accept admonition, for example, but Wu-yin Fa-shih includes them all under their broad heading rather than stressing each precept one by one. She believes that the nuns must first grasp the general principle of the Vinaya (chieh-lü) by research, study and by gaining an insight into its origins, structure and purpose. The importance of discipline and morality (Ch. shih-luo; Skt. śīla) and of the meaning of all the precepts within the context in which they were established is also emphasised as is their general function of eliminating the mental delusions, reducing the commission of wrongdoings and of creating an environment conducive to harmonious monastic community.

Nearly two-thirds of the thirty Nīhsargika-Pāyantika Dharmas directly relate to robes or the robe-cloth and as such can logically be approached under the general heading of Robes. Within the Pāyantika Dharmas there are many precepts concerning the giving of ordination, the duties of a preceptor, the robes, food, disputes, public conduct, etiquette around bhikṣus and men, bathing, care of the body and travel. Because they relate to the realities of daily life, both historically and to a large extent currently, the majority of these rules can be taught under the broad heading of Appropriate Conduct. The Saikṣa Dharmas, which constitute the penultimate class of precepts, contain 100 rules of conduct essentially governing the deportment surrounding eating, sitting, walking, wearing the robes, relating with the lay community and preaching. Taiwanese bhikṣunīs are

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77 The third category of precept, following the Pārājika and Saṅghāvaśeṣa Dharmas. The term means 'forfeiture'; faults must be confessed before four bhikṣunīs.

78 This is the fourth category of precepts, meaning 'expiation'. Numbering 178, they encompass a wide range of minor offences which require confession before one other bhikṣunī.
rigorously trained in all these aspects of the nun’s conduct from the moment they enter a temple as a laywoman and this is further reinforced during their bhikṣuṇī ordination.

Chao-hui Fa-shih, a senior bhikṣuṇī, abbess of Shuang-lin Ssu and articulate activist for the rights of animals, explained to me the need to understand the real meaning of practice in order to keep the precepts correctly. Using such understanding, there are various adjustments which can be made, but individuals cannot personally choose their own preferences as this would promote an unacceptable level of flexibility and disunity within the monastic community. She states that the main goals of the monastic community are to keep the Buddhadharma pure and to remember the purpose of the precepts.

One example she gave was in reference to holding money. Although it is impractical to insist that monastics abstain from carrying money at all times, it is the mind of greed which is to be avoided. This is the Dharma practice connected with this precept, and as the main function of Vinaya is to purify and enhance Dharma practice, it is necessary to keep referring to Vinaya when making adjustments and to know the purpose of the precepts. If the monastic community as a whole understands this principle, they can collectively and individually make correct decisions if a special situation arises. In this way, they will not ignorantly transgress precepts nor will they invite criticism or misunderstanding by the lay community.

Another example given by Chao-hui Fa-shih is the precept of stock-piling for too long the Kathina cloth which has been donated for robe-making. Attachment to the cloth is to be avoided and the inconvenience of not having adequate robes in order to be able to continue the work of Dharma propagation is clearly understood. A third example given by Chao-hui Fa-shih concerned the prohibition of a nun going out alone. In this case, the
first priority is safety and protection of the precepts, however in the modern world of
day, security and convenient transportation, there are many areas where it is quite safe
for one nun to go alone. She also spoke about the importance of mindfulness and of the
public behaviour of monastics conforming to the Vinaya. She gave two examples, firstly
of a nun speaking privately to a man and secondly of a nun purchasing jade at a jewellery
store. Although her motivations may be quite innocuous and even virtuous, lay observers
may be hurt and confused by what they have seen.\footnote{79}

At Hsiang-kuang Ssu, the individual precepts in each category are examined to gain an
understanding of their origin and relevance in ancient Buddhist India, their wording and
definition and the circumstances surrounding their creation. They are then analysed to
ascertain their current applicability within Taiwan society and culture. Only then can the
nuns adjust their modern lives according to what is prohibited (chih-ch’ih) and what is
prescribed (tso-ch’ih)\footnote{80} without violating any fundamental rule or essential principle.

In addition to the Dharmagupta Bhikṣuṇī Pratimokṣa and the Skandhaka (chien-tu pu)
which contain the procedures and formal acts of the Samgha, the nuns follow the spirit of
the Ch’ing-kuei or Pure Rule to regulate temple life.\footnote{81} Even though formulated many

\footnote{79} Interviews with Chao-hui Fa-shih, Shuang-lin Temple, Chungli County, and Vihāra of Universal
Vows, Taipei city, Taiwan, October, 1997.

\footnote{80} Included in what is prohibited are the first category of eight Pārājika and the second category of
seventeen Saṃghavasēṣa. This constitutes the minimum standard of observation of the precepts and it is
clear that they should be strictly observed in their entirety and without any leniency or adaptation. In
addition, the required penalties for their commission should be implemented. The twenty vastus in the
Skandhaka (ehr-shih chien-tu) contain the prescribed rituals, practices and formal acts (Skt. karman) of a
monastic community. There are also prescriptive precepts which monastic communities should observe.

\footnote{81} See footnote 61.
centuries ago, the universal practicality of the Pure Rule makes it suitable for widespread use today with only minor adaptations needed to conform to local circumstances and customs.

The nuns also implement what they term ‘local Vinaya’ (*sui-fang p’i-ni*), which allows for practical adjustments to rules based upon local demands and situations. By bearing in mind the time and circumstances under which the Vinaya originated in India, and by understanding the original meaning and purpose of the precepts as they evolved, this system permits monastics to adapt their clothing to Chinese custom, to bathe more than the stated twice a month, to handle money or drive a vehicle and to adjust eating regimens. It enables the nuns to accommodate their lives within the twentieth century without committing any unacceptable breach of the perfect precept (*chü tsu chieh*) or behaving in any way which would arouse the criticism or loss of faith of the lay community. In addition, it is necessary to live within the national laws and social conventions. Nuns cannot travel around Taiwan on public transport without carrying money*82* nor can they go to the front of queues or insist on only sitting next to female passengers. In these cases, the principle of *k’ai chih ch’ih fan*, opening the prohibitions, applies.

It is clear from the Vinaya that the Buddha himself adjusted the prescribed rituals and the precepts during his own lifetime, adding or retracting rules or changing the circumstances under which certain rules operated. Among others, many of the precepts concerning food and its consumption went through a series of adaptations during the Buddha’s lifetime,

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*82* It is not in the interests of independent nuns’ communities to entrust finances to lay Buddhists. As Wu-yin Fa-shih explained to me, once laypeople are in control of a nunnery’s finances, those nuns are immediately placed in a position of dependence and subservience. Two nuns manage Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s financial affairs, an accountant and a bookkeeper, and when nuns leave the temple precincts, one nun handles the money for the entire group.
depending upon whether monks were begging for alms, living in a vihāra, or were sick or aged. Wu-yin Fa-shih conforms to the category of rules concerning food by prohibiting any individual nun to consume food alone, but if a nun is hungry between meals she may go to the special area of the nunnery kitchen where she is in full view of other nuns, announce her intention to eat and then take light refreshments. Furthermore, because most of Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s nuns work hard during the day, they are permitted to take a light evening meal (yao-shih) which they regard as medicine. This adaptation of the rule to suit modern situations still ensures moderation in eating and awareness of the purpose of taking food. 83 In accordance with Chinese Buddhist custom, all monastics are vegetarian and even extend their observance of non-harm to living beings to include wearing only clothes and shoes which are not made from animal products.

Furthermore, Wu-yin Fa-shih believes that it is of the utmost importance to care for the physical body and be well nourished, for the human body is the vehicle by which a nun can be of use to others and through which she can utilise her ability and potential to fulfil the Buddha’s purpose. 84 General physical well-being is taken seriously at Hsiang-kuang Ssu and while I was staying at the nunnery, on several occasions an experienced female practitioner of ch’i-kung visited the nunnery to treat nuns for various ailments. She attends to the nuns regularly as an offering to the temple and to express her appreciation

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83 Before taking food, the Chinese Buddhist monastic must recollect the Five Contemplations, namely, 1. considering the work involved in producing the food, from its origins to the table; 2. weighing up whether one has sufficient merit to deserve taking food; 3. guarding the mind attentively against faults, in particular greed; 4. regarding the food as medicine to nourish and strengthen the body for service; 5. determining to accept the food as an offering to encourage one on the spiritual path.

84 This view also accords with the Buddha’s special permission for ill bhikṣunīs to ask for and eat high quality foods. The category of eight Pratideśaniya Dharmas for bhikṣunīs also stipulate that it is not wrong to beg for ghee, oil, honey, molasses, milk, curd, fish and meat if a nun is sick. The penalty for a bhikṣuni begging for such foods if she is not ill is confession before one bhikṣu or bhikṣuni. Although Pāyantika No. 40 for bhikṣus contains almost the same wording, the severity of the transgression is greater in that category of precept.
of the nun's life.

The *P'i-ni jih yung*, Vinaya for Daily Use, also governs the life of the nuns, providing them with verses to recite for all episodes of the day and helping to channel their minds into awareness and moderation. From waking, through washing, dressing, ringing the bell, eating, drinking, bowing, meditating, head shaving, to sleeping, 53 appropriate verses remind the monastic of her sacred obligations and precepts.

In addition to the bhikṣuṇī precepts, the spirit of the bodhisattva precepts contained in the *Brahma Net Sūtra* (*Fan-wang ching*) also regulate the behaviour and the attitudes of the nuns. Wu-yin Fa-shih believes that the bodhisattva precepts form a connection between individuals in society and that they dictate a nun's conduct in relation to others. The bodhisattva precepts are used to commit the Saṃgha to society and to all beings. The bhikṣuṇī precepts very clearly set out the individual practice and conduct of a nun for her own spiritual development, but the bodhisattva precepts form a link between that nun and the rest of society. Wu-yin Fa-shih drew a diagram during one of our discussions which consisted of a large circle representing the greater society. Within that circle one segment represented the Buddhist lay community and another represented the entire Saṃgha, inside of which one part denoted the Bhikṣuṇī Saṃgha. She emphasised that the Chinese bhikṣuṇī is not separated from or outside of society, but that her purpose in contributing to society is a part of the Mahāyāna spirit.

A chapter about Vows in Action would not be complete without some mention of the place the Eight Chief Rules (*pa ching fa*) occupy in the life of Hsiang-kuang Ssu. As
there is some controversy surrounding the origin and authenticity of these Rules.\(^85\) I sought Ming-chia Fa-shih's opinion on the matter. Without actually saying they may be a later interpolation, she expressed her belief that some interpretation is needed as they originated in ancient India. Wu-yin Fa-shih stated that the Eight Rules are not as heavy and partial as they appear because, if viewed in the position which most of them also occupy within the category of *Pāyantika Dharmas*, they are very light.

The first rule appears to be the most problematic of the eight, namely, that any nun whatever her status, should rise and show deference to any monk, however new he may be, reciprocation of which action is not permitted. Wu-yin Fa-shih believes that it is important that there be mutual respect between everyone, and bhikṣus should therefore also show equal respect to bhikṣuṇīs. The second and third rules are unequal in giving monks the right to admonish nuns but forbidding nuns to rebuke even offensive or heretical monks. These situations do not normally arise in a nunnery, however.

Rules four and five demand, respectively, that the Bhikṣu Saṃgha must be called upon for half-monthly instruction to bhikṣuṇīs, and to administer penance after the commission of a *Samghāvāseṣa* offence. The situation referred to in rule five has never occurred at Hsiang-kuang Ssu. As it is stipulated within the general body of the Vinaya that intending bhikṣuṇīs must present themselves before the dual Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Saṃgha for full ordination, rule six has been only sporadically observed throughout Buddhist history and this indicates that bhikṣuṇīs have not always been able to obey all Eight Rules.

\(^85\) In what seems to be a clear indication that the Eight Rules may be a later interpolation, it is interesting to note that all the rules, excepting rules three and five, have identical or almost identical counterparts among the bhikṣuṇī *Pāyantika-Dharmas*. See Appendix 1 for a complete Table including comparisons with relevant *Pāyantika-Dharmas*.
Rules seven and eight traditionally stipulate dependence upon the Bhikṣu Saṃgha for the prescriptions of rainy season retreat (varaṇa) and the examination of behaviour (pravāraṇa) which follows the rains retreat. However Ming-chia Fa-shih stated that no bhikṣus attend Hsiang-kuang Ssu for any Saṃgha rituals. The nuns manage the nunnery without any interference or control from outside, but at the onset of the rains retreat, representatives of the nunnery do visit a neighbouring monastery to request the abbot to assume the responsibility of retreat master.

During the retreat, the daily routine remains the same with the exception of additional teachings and the commitment of individual nuns to concentrate on specific aspects of Buddhist practice. Wu-yin Fa-shih told me that the retreat is not just a time to live constantly in the temple, but a time for the nuns to gather together their own religious questions and seek further understanding. She stressed that it is a very beneficial time.

Because of the temple’s obligations to the local laity, to sponsors, university Buddhist groups and local government, nuns are permitted to leave the temple but not for any mundane purpose. At the conclusion of the retreat, the nuns perform pravāraṇa in respect of what has been seen, heard or suspected during the retreat, convening in groups to discuss their thoughts and actions. Ming-chia Fa-shih also pointed out that when Hsiang-kuang Ssu is not formally observing varaṇa, in many ways the entire year resembles a rains retreat as the nuns do not often go out for non-Buddhist purposes.

In addition, all bhikṣunis at Hsiang-kuang Ssu meticulously observe the twice-monthly

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86 Ming-chia Fa-shih also stated that there are only two rituals bhikṣunis absolutely cannot perform, namely consecration of Buddha statues and single ordination of bhikṣunis by bhikṣus without the additional ordination by bhikṣus.
recitation and review of both the 348 bhikṣuṇī precepts (*poṣadha*) and the ten major and 48 minor bodhisattava precepts, as this is a prescription which should not be dispensed with. As prescribed, they do not perform the recitation in the presence of any bhikṣus.

Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s Rules Committee (*fa-wei hui*) decides how the temple will approach and deal with whatever special disciplinary and inter-personal situations arise. It is also the Rules Committee from which a nun must seek permission to take vacation, visit her family or leave the temple overnight. Although nuns may leave the temple alone, they try and combine excursions outside so, for example, if they need to visit the doctor, the temple will try and organise a group of nuns who all wish to see the doctor. The Rules Committee also formulates rules concerning dealings with lay people, either within the temple precincts or outside it. It establishes rules of dress and deportment; nuns must not leave the temple without wearing socks and *luo-han kua* and any nun working in a public area of the temple such as the Reception Office or Shrine-hall must be suitably attired. Nuns must wear the long robe whenever they teach or attend public Buddhist ceremonies.

Discipline is administered according to the Vinaya, and any nun who commits a *Pārājika* offence must leave the temple after discussion with the abbess. All the nuns and the family of the offender are formally notified and the expulsion is published in the temple’s magazine. Although no nun has so far confessed transgression of a *Saṅghāvaśeṣa*, the prescribed rite, which contains three steps, living apart (*parivāsa*), penance (*mānatva*)

88 The *Poṣadha* which I attended was a very dignified and serious ritual which it is mandatory for all nuns present at the nunnery to attend unless they are indisposed and submit their name. One bhikṣuṇi, whose position is rotated each fortnight, recited the entire Prātimokṣa Sūtra, waiting at the appropriate places to allow for bhikṣuṇis to verbally confess their misdemeanours if there were any. Following the recitation, the bhikṣuṇis continued to stand in their rows, in order of ordination and discussed informally what had been observed during the preceding two weeks. Several other matters pertaining to the observance of precepts and relations with laypeople visiting the nunnery were raised and the nuns became very animated as they discussed possible solutions.
and rehabilitation (āvarhana), is in place. The lesser categories of precepts carry with them correspondingly lesser penalties such as confession before the entire assembly of bhikṣunīs or simple confession before one other bhikṣuni.

Hygiene is a personal matter at Hsiang-kuang Ssu, and despite the precept to only bathe twice a month, nuns may bathe daily especially during summer months. Because Chiayi’s climate is tropical, the nuns shave their heads every seven to ten days which also exceeds that stipulated in the Vinaya. Furthermore, they are aware that unduly long hair arouses criticism, in the same way that unkempt dress and undignified physical deportment offends the lay community. The nuns are mindful of their responsibility to the laypeople and this attitude of commitment and spiritual obligation clearly influences their behaviour and dealings with Buddhists at large. They also nurture respect for each other as spiritual companions on the Path committed to the same way of life and religious goals. Because she is a religious person, a teacher, a renunciant and as such represents the Buddha, the nun cooperates with her sisters in the spirit of the precepts, which cooperation is summarised within the spirit of the Six Rules of Harmonious Community Living, so that she may accomplish great things and increase her goodness (fu-pao).

In addition, the nuns should understand and have faith in the Ten Benefits of the Precepts (shih chung li-i) as set out in the Vinaya. Because of the breadth of application of these ten, it is worth including them here:

1. that the Samgha will be regulated in their communities according to the Buddha’s

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89 Compare with *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism*, where Holmes Welch describes how even visits to the lavatories were strictly controlled.
90 See footnote 62 above.
91 See Wu-yin Fa-shih and Chien-han Fa-shih, *Ssu fen pi-ch’iu-ni chieh pu-ch’ung chiao ts’ai* (op. cit.), p. 5.
teachings;

2. that monastics will be peaceful and happy;
3. that monastics will have comfort, a place to eat and sleep;
4. that those with no faith in Buddhism will be encouraged to develop it;
5. that those who already have faith will increase their confidence, faith and belief in Buddhism;
6. that those who are restless will be calmed;
7. that those with a sense of shame from misbehaviour will have a chance to correct it;
8. that monastics will be able to eliminate their present sufferings;
9. that monastics will be able to prevent their future sufferings;
10. that the Dharma will spread and be sustained for all time.

Wu-yin Fa-shih has condensed these ten benefits into three:

1. that the Samgha will be able to study and be happy and harmonious;
2. that they will be accepted by society and transform society;
3. that the goal of the Samgha will be to enlighten everybody by their involvement with others.

The precepts are maintained among the Samgha as a community and in this way the entire group has involvement in and responsibility for the continuation of pure Vinaya observance.
4. Religious Education

The first and most important philosophy which Wu-yin Fa-shih has formulated with regard to education at Hsiang-kuang Ssu is that all nuns should have the opportunity and the right to study. Secondly, the nuns should support one another and respect each other’s endeavours and goals. A diverse system of religious and secular education should be in place so that each nun may utilise her own particular talents and abilities. Wu-yin Fa-shih states that every nun is unique and that the community of unique nuns together forms a great Samgha group who between them have the same goal of studying and realising the Buddha’s teachings and the same duty and purpose of teaching Buddhism to the lay community. She says:

A religious teacher should be well educated. We become nuns according to the Buddha; we follow the Buddha to become nuns. Although Dharma exists in books, in society we must have somebody to be the model for others to follow. A bhikṣuṇī is part of the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Samgha. People can see the Dharma from the Samgha, so the Samgha must be well educated to practise Buddha’s teaching in the world to show to all people. Lay people do not need such a thorough Buddhist education, but a nun must be well educated.

Wu-yin Fa-shih goes on to say:

Clearly a nun is different from a lay person. The lay person follows the Buddha and does what Buddha teaches, so in that way we are the same, but the nun is different from a lay person and she looks different. The nun follows Buddha’s teaching and behaves correctly in accordance with her precepts, but in addition, she must make a contribution to society. So, being a nun, besides correcting her behaviour, also means completing her mission, that is, letting Buddha’s teaching spread throughout society. The lay person’s correct study is to follow Buddha’s teaching, but most of their time is spent in working and caring for their family. Being a nun, we have family: Buddha’s family, Buddha’s home. It is the same, but our ability and spirit is directed to honouring the Buddha. Besides her conduct and observing her behaviour of body and mind, the most important thing for a nun is practising Buddha’s teaching as a contribution to society.92

92 Interview with Wu-yin Fa-shih, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
She has told her nuns that many lay Buddhists have a simplistic and often incorrect understanding of Buddhism, believing that bowing, offering incense and praying are all that is necessary. As a result, her nuns have been teaching lay Buddhists for over ten years, instructing them in the basic teaching of the Buddha, how to respect the Three Jewels and live according to Buddhist ethics.

Wu-yin Fa-shih points out that a degree of secular education is essential to prepare monastics for their role in modern society. Shih Jien-shen translates her comments:

Monastics are a part of the society and they have social responsibility. Monastic education is to give a monastic both the training of one’s life and profound understanding of Buddha’s teaching, then she/he can offer religious interpretation for social phenomena and problems and help people reflect individual life. For this reason, the curriculum for monastics should include Buddhist studies, spiritual practice and missionary training. In order to spread Buddhism, any kind of learning is useful. I think a curriculum which is limited to Buddhist studies is not enough because students would have difficulties to transform those studies when they return to the real world. They would find a discrepancy and hesitate to apply their learning in daily life. So I agree some basic courses are necessary for developing one’s religiosity; at the same time, we need skills and knowledge to be used in dealing with monastic life and distribution of Buddhism.93

Wu-yin Fa-shih has long nurtured a strong ambition to change the Buddhist environment in Taiwan. She is convinced that this change will come about as a result of education, and in particular, by raising the standard of bhikṣunīs and developing their strengths so that they can be empowered and independent. Pivotal in this development is her belief in the necessity of having nuns-only temples where nuns can be in control of their lives and can function free of interference from either monks or laity. She believes that others can work on educating monks, and that it is her task to concentrate on educating nuns and to create and administer a nuns’ temple which carefully follows Vinaya and which may serve as a model for other nunneries.

Wu-yin Fa-shih admires the ideas and strategies which T'ai-hsü implemented to reform monastic education in the 1920s and 1930s in China. He had concluded that three areas within Chinese monastic Buddhism needed improvement: the focus of the Buddha’s teaching; organisation of the Samgha system; and management of monastery property. In keeping with his philosophy that Buddhism should meet the needs of society, that the Samgha system should be updated, that monastics should play a key role in ‘enlivening Buddhism’ and that monastic education is the way to accomplish these goals, T’ai-hsü established a system of education which encompassed these needs. He emphasised Vinaya training, Buddhist learning and practice, with an additional foundation of secular education. 94

Wu-yin Fa-shih has said:

Since Venerable T’ai-hsü established Buddhist seminaries, in which existed the most important education of monks and nuns, I also studied in a Buddhist seminary. Although it is not the perfect education for monks and nuns, it is the more practical one. 95

Her own system of administration and education has been in operation for almost twenty years and is coming to enjoy a considerable standing among Taiwan’s nunneries. Although there are other bhikṣuṇī institutes in Taiwan, Hsiang-kuang ni-chung fo-hsüeh-yüan possesses a particularly well-organised and structured syllabus utilising established and proven teaching methods and working towards well-defined goals.

The monastic education system at Hsiang-kuang Ssu is divided into basic education,
normal (teacher) education and continuing and advanced education. Hsiang-kuang Bhikṣuṇī Institute uses some of the standard Buddhist works contained in the three parts of the Buddhist Tripitaka: Sūtra, Vinaya and Abhidharma, and combines education in these three with human studies, propagation training and cultivation of the Buddhist path. In addition to the inclusion of the main popular sūtras, such as the Avatamsaka, the Lotus and the Diamond sūtras, the general syllabus is divided into nine sections each of which have a class curriculum and specified goals. These nine categories are:

cultivation of discipline and virtue (lü-i te yang);

religious doctrine (chiao-i);

religious history and organisation (tsung-shih chih-tu);

specialised religious doctrines (chuan tsung);

specialised research topics (chuan t'i yen-chiu);

humanities (jen-wen-hsüeh);

Śamatha and Vipaśyanā (hsing-ch‘ih chih-kuan);

samgha duties and work (seng shih);

propagation (hung-hu).97

Wu-yin Fa-shih places great emphasis upon an intending nun possessing the correct motivation for ordination and a deep understanding of the purpose and ‘mission’ of

96 Hsiang-kuang ni-seng t'uan shih-er chou nien t'e k'an (Hsiang-kuang chüang-yen tsa-chih she, 1992), p. 30.
97 ibid., pp. 41-44.
Chinese Buddhist nuns. In order to develop these attitudes, a thorough system of self-examination and study has been carefully formulated for all hsing-che at Hsiang-kuang Ssu to undertake over a period of two years. The study program for hsing-che is divided into three categories: Vow and aspiration (pen-yüan), Knowledge (chih-chien) and Cultivating practice (hsiu-ch’ih).98

The first category, Vow and Aspiration, contains two sections: motivation for leaving the home life and probing into the self. Under the heading of Mental Attitudes for Leaving the Home Life, the hsing-che is taught to investigate the reasons for becoming a nun and the purpose of the ordained life. She is guided to recognise and clarify her original intention and expand it into an active force. In addition, she investigates the development and practice of bodhi-mind, or the mind of compassion, the central element of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Finally, she learns methods to bring to fruition her vow of attaining her objective of ordination. Through examining the workings of the self, the hsing-che is encouraged to take notes and write a Dharma practice diary containing comments on self-examination of thoughts and actions which have arisen in the course of her daily life.

Two groups of subjects are included within the Knowledge category: the foundation of knowledge and introduction to the organisation of the Saṃgha. Foundation of Knowledge refers to gaining an understanding of the basis of Buddhism and particularly of monastic Buddhism. The subjects in this section include learning the significance of the Triple Jewel and the place of Saṃgha within that trinity. At this point, the hsing-che also learns the reasons why the Buddha established the Saṃgha community and the history and development of its founding, the establishment of Buddhism in China and the

98 ibid., p. 29.

It is important for the *hsing-che* to understand the structure and organisation of the Samgha and Buddhist monasteries if she is to join the Samgha and become a fully qualified exponent and advocate of Buddhism and Buddhist monasticism. She must study the history and development of Samgha organisation, the principles of Samgha education and possible undertakings and careers for Samgha members. In addition, she learns about temple administration and organisation and the function and purpose of each department of the temple.

The third part of the *hsing-che*’s formal training and education, that of Practice, consists of training in the cultivation of observance and of mindful behaviour. The first section within this category contains topics concerning appropriate behaviour for Samgha members, including methods for learning and recitation of the morning and evening devotions and for instilling strong habits for diligence in conduct. The second section introduces the *hsing-che* to the rules of the Samgha and of temple life (*kuei-yüeh*), including study and examination of the meaning and purpose of rules, and drills and methods to facilitate recognition and comprehension of the codes of rules governing daily temple life. Rules for community living are also explained. The final section of the third category introduces the *hsing-che* to the life and the work of graduate bhiksūnis who are involved in the temple or outside in its affiliated institutes. By learning how to combine both duties and practice, the *hsing-che* is shown how a beginner can transform into a knowledgeable and confident adherent of monasticism, capable of being placed in
positions of leadership and authority.

When the *hsing-che* has completed this course of study and has satisfied *Wu-yin Fa-shih* of her stability and her readiness to embark on the ordained life, she shaves her head and passes through the last transitional step, that of *ch’u-chia* or leaving the home life, before proceeding to novice ordination as a *sha-mi-ni*.

Training and education for the novice are designed to create an individual who has gained familiarity with basic Buddhist teachings and with *Sha-mi-ni* Vinaya, and who is concerned with developing stable conduct and more fully adapting to *Saṃgha* life. To this end, work and practice are emphasised. The novice relies upon the Buddhist rite of repentance bowing, and upon manual work. By combining this with study of Vinaya and discipline she develops the rudiments of skills in leadership, assumption of responsibility and dignity of demeanour. The physical work which the novice must perform is the most strenuous of all the levels of monastic within the organisational structure of the temple. According to Buddhist belief, she is erasing and purifying her past negativities and the obstacles to her further advancement on the path towards bhikṣuṇīhood. As in other monastic traditions, the novitiate is a time for deep reflection, purification and the development of unwavering conviction in the nun’s life. It is a time when the novice must develop a religious mind and establish firm faith in Buddhism. Only then will the abbess send her to receive the bhikṣuṇī precepts at the Triple Platform Ordination.

After the new bhikṣuṇī returns to Hsiang-kuang Temple from her ordination at the ordaining temple, she continues for the next five years to maintain the full conduct and ritual which she has learned and practised for the duration of the ordination ceremony. She also enters the Bhikṣuṇī Institute and, as a student bhikṣuṇī, embarks upon a broad
and varied course of learning which consists of three years of Tripitaka study and two further years of specialised subjects.

The syllabus includes study of the śūtras and śāstras, Buddhist outline and topics, instruction in reading and appraising the scriptures, and in the bodhisattva paths and stages. The student nun also studies Tibetan Buddhism and the history of Indian and Chinese Buddhism, before delving more deeply into such Chinese Buddhist schools as the Pure Land (Ching-t’u) and Ch’an Schools. She also examines various Buddhist schools of thought including the Cittamātra or Mind-Only (wei-shih) School and the Mādyamika School and Middle Way theory (chung-lun). The Vinaya is approached in more depth, using such texts as Chieh-lü ch‘üan shu (The Complete Vinaya) and Ssu-fen-lü tsang (Dharmagupta Vinaya).

Religious practice includes thorough instruction in Buddhist chant, the morning and evening Buddhist services (tsao k‘o and wan k‘o) and the use of such Buddhist religious instruments as the gong (ta ch‘ing), wooden fish (mu-yü) and the hand-bell (yin ch‘ing). The nuns are also taught to recite the bhikṣuni and bodhisattva precepts according to Vinaya requirement. Once a year for ten days, the nunnery is closed and instruction in ch’an meditation is given under retreat conditions to all the nuns. In addition, Fo ch‘i, or Seven-day Buddha Recitation Retreat is observed, during which the name of Amitābha Buddha is repeated.

Secular subjects include writing, Chinese literature, painting and calligraphy, psychology, psychology counselling, philosophy, social studies, comparative religions, studies in education and educational methods, and English.
Propagation of Buddhism is considered very important in Taiwan, as it was in mainland
China, and the lay community expects a nun to be able to teach Buddhist doctrine and
answer religious questions. Hsiang-kuang Ssu provides a range of courses to train the
bhikṣuṇīs in all aspects of Buddhist teaching, human relations and missionary work. They are taught the theory of missionary work, leadership skills, how to give public
teachings and plan and coordinate group activities. They are also instructed in radio
broadcasting, publishing, computer operation and temple management and administration.

By completing the Institute study course, the nuns aim to achieve lofty goals. As well as
cultivating a deep familiarity with the Buddha’s teachings, Buddhist ideology, with
Vinaya and with nunnery life, discipline and religious practice, they aim to develop
attitudes of responsibility, sincerity, honesty, obedience, self-reliance and cooperation.
They develop the ability to face and resolve problems, to adapt to temple life and to avoid
craving a life of comfort. They learn to identify clearly the different roles of lay and
ordained practitioners, to recognise the needs of society, and by taking the initiative, to
shoulder responsibility with courage and wisdom and lead group activities confidently.

The three stated goals of Hsiang-kuang Ssu’s education system are that the nun,
thoroughly educated in religious studies, should possess the spirit of offering her life to
the Buddha. She should have magnanimity, a well developed intellect, and the ability and
intellectual capacity to propagate Buddhism.

5. Nunnery Obligations

In 1974, when Buddhist nuns first began living at the temple, the local people were not
familiar with the idea of Hsiang-kuang Ssu being a nunnery. They did not visit or pay
homage to the Buddha, a beautiful image of whom was installed there. To introduce themselves, establish an atmosphere of approachability and to reach out to the villagers, the nuns soon began holding activity weekends and classes for the local women, instructing them in the traditional arts of flower arrangement, painting, vegetarian cookery and singing folk and Buddhist songs. In addition, classes were held for children which were aimed at involving them in group activities designed to draw out their talents and creativity. Languages, music and singing, writing and art classes became very popular with local children, who derived so much enjoyment that they continue to return every year. The nuns have since woven simple Buddhist teachings on such subjects as the life of the Buddha and basic ethics into the activities, and by these skillful methods have thus created a mutually beneficial and enduring relationship between the temple and the local villagers.

Two annual Buddhist festivals are celebrated at Hsiang-kuang Ssu by lay people and nuns alike. At Chinese New Year, which falls in the Chinese winter vacation, they celebrate together with an elaborate offering of lights, the paper shades of which they make themselves. The second festival, which usually falls in May or June, honours the Buddha’s birthday. Its organisation begins one month before the actual event, with the nuns forming groups to plan and take charge of the festivities, which include chanting, offering and feasting.

Summer Camp, which lasts for one week, and spring and autumn camps, which last three days each, are also coordinated by the nuns for students, young children and for adults. Apart from these special activities, the temple hosts Dharma activities on the fourth
Sunday of every month. Usually twenty to forty people from the surrounding villages and from Chiayi city attend and participate in specially designed prayer programs to inspire and refresh their minds. In addition, people visit the temple every day to talk to the nuns, pay homage in the Kuan-yin Hall, offer incense, make donations and perform some temple chores as an offering of physical work. Every weekend, to prepare for general visitors, the dining room's large, round tables are laid out and as lunchtime approaches, numerous vegetarian dishes are arranged for the lay guests who converse jovially and make many trips to the steaming rice-cooker in the middle of the room. The nunnery represents an oasis, a peaceful respite from their hectic worldly lives.

Schools and university Buddhist clubs often invite the nuns to deliver lectures or give Buddhist presentations, and since 1990, they have also been visiting prisons to guide prisoners, many of whom are Buddhists and in need of compassionate advice. The nuns regularly visit hospitals to comfort sick and dying people and they also counsel disturbed teenagers who have committed crimes. The nuns who carry out this work in society live in the cities in small groups for three to five years before returning to Hsiang-kuang Ssu. Monks and nuns of mainland China did not frequently engage in social-welfare work until early this century when innovative monks introduced the idea, and the political climate changed so that the practice became more necessary and useful. However, this trend has gathered momentum in Taiwan with many temples undertaking welfare programs to benefit the elderly, the infirm, the homeless, children and prisoners. In addition, as has traditionally been the case in all Buddhist countries, the very presence of Buddhist temples in the midst of society is a reassurance. They serve as centres of

100 See Holmes Welch’s chapter on Social Action by the Samgha in The Buddhist Revival in China (pp. 121-131), for a description of how social work by monastics has traditionally been viewed, and of how its practice began and developed in twentieth-century China.
community life and as a focus for the devotion of the laity.

Clearly, Hsiang-kuang Ssu's nuns are not closed off or detached from society. In fact their principal purpose is to serve and enrich society through Buddhist teaching and guidance, benevolent and charitable works and through religious practice. I often witnessed pilgrims arrive at the temple seemingly burdened by grief or confusion and depart a few hours later consoled by the cheerful wisdom and compassion of the nuns. All the temple's activities and obligations for the lay community are supported by the nuns' practical application of the bodhisattva ideal, so that their activities and interactions with society are profoundly meaningful and beneficial.

6. An Abbess for Contemporary Taiwan - Wu-yin Fa-shih

Wu-yin Fa-shih was born in central Taiwan in 1940 to parents who believed in Kuan-yin Bodhisattva. Although popular Buddhism in Taiwan at that time consisted mainly of folk practices, lighting incense at the local temple, worshipping earth deities and nature spirits and remembering the ancestors, Wu-yin Fa-shih also developed a keen faith in Kuan-yin, whose image was housed in a nearby temple. Wu-yin Fa-shih said that as soon as she was old enough to learn something about Buddhism, a strong wish to be a nun began to crystallise in her mind. Her aspiration was further reinforced after her family moved to Taipei when she was sixteen and she had her first opportunity to participate in a Buddhist ceremony. The appearance of the many monks and nuns impressed her; she wanted to emulate them because they looked religious and dignified and wore "drifting robes". Her motivation further increased after she met a monk whom she considered to be her teacher or shih-fu. He gave her many
teachings and told her stories about the Buddha and his disciples. She became convinced she wanted to be like them.

Within the same year, she began visiting Abbot Pai-sheng's San-tsang Institute to take part in ceremonies. She memorised the daily prayers and chants, and found that, although she did not have a realisation of their deep meaning, she felt intensely joyful. It was at that time that she underwent the ceremony of ch’u-chia. She was seventeen years old. In 1957 she shaved her head as a novice nun at San-tsang Institute with Abbot Ming-chung. Two years later, as soon as she turned twenty, she received her bhikṣuṇī precepts at the same Institute. In 1963 she graduated from the Institute’s senior level of Buddhist studies, and the same year moved to Hsing-lung Temple in Kaohsiung to study under T’ien-i Fa-shih, who was to become her mentor and model. Her education continued unabated, firstly with five years in the Chinese faculty of Taiwan’s Chinese Culture University from which she graduated in 1976, and followed by three years of post-graduate study in Hawaii.

Soon after returning from Hawaii, she agreed to the invitation made by the followers at Hsiang-kuang Temple to take up the position of the Temple’s second abbess. The same year, 1980, she founded Hsiang-kuang Bhiksuni Institute and became its director. The next year she also agreed to become the head of Chiayi’s Buddhist Association. Currently she holds the position of Dean of the Luminary International Bhikṣuṇī Society.

Wu-yin Fa-shih’s principal mission is the education of nuns, and she has very clear ideas about this. She believes that teachers are crucial to spreading Buddha’s teachings. In the past, the standard of monks was higher than nuns, but presently the nuns need to become self-sufficient and make a lasting contribution to Buddhist society through teaching,
service and Buddhist activities.

Wu-yin Fa-shih believes that nuns should not begin to propagate Buddhism until they themselves have a good understanding of the Buddha’s teachings, of ethics and of Vinaya. She herself practised and studied for many years before beginning to teach and it is her belief that other nuns should do the same, preferably in nuns-only establishments. It is more difficult for nuns in shared monasteries to reach their potential and they are rarely free of certain prejudiced attitudes, however subtle they may be. She says, “If nuns are just being ordered around and made to do all the menial work and are not treated well, they should leave such a temple and return to a nuns’ temple.” It is Wu-yin Fa-shih’s feeling that nuns in Taiwan can do anything because they have strong determination and because they have the opportunity to reach a high educational standard. Most nuns in today’s nunneries in Taiwan are well educated; many temples belong to the nuns and as a result of their community activities, the temples have become rather affluent. This independent economic base gives nuns the freedom to complete their education and teach others. Wu-yin Fa-shih’s view concurs with that of Khandro Rinpoche, whom we shall meet in Section III below, that nuns must be economically independent, able to control their nunnery’s own finances and keep those financial matters from lay interference.

At Hsiang-kuang Temple, Wu-yin Fa-shih has established the idea of her Samgha belonging to everybody. She wants the nunnery to belong to anyone who goes there to study; that anyone who has decided to go there has been moved to do so by Hsiang-kuang Temple’s whole Samgha and because each individual nun is part of the whole. At Hsiang-kuang Temple, nuns are the important people; they are the centre of nunnery structure and it is they who study and they who will contribute to society. The important
thing is the contribution and the function of the Temple and its occupants, not the Temple itself, which is merely a place, an institution. Wu-yin Fa-shih says:

The monastery is only an institution, it should hold no secret, no mystery. It should be of benefit to everybody. Nuns and monks must be clear in understanding what their function, their role, is. Why was it that they became a bhikṣu or bhikṣunī? They should not make themselves appear mysterious, but let themselves have meaning and purpose and fulfil society’s needs.101

Nuns, as central to the nunnery, should be sent to receive their bhikṣunī precepts when they are prepared, and then they must observe them. This gives them rights within the Samgha. Wu-yin Fa-shih stresses that a novice is training to be a bhikṣunī and in that capacity she may be able to discuss issues occasionally, but she can never make community decisions.

Wu-yin Fa-shih has carefully structured her nunnery to reflect the changing role of nuns, their work and level of achievement. Her view is that only a few people should do the ordinary work, but that many people should do specialised work. The majority of her nuns are trained and are creative in particular skills, in marked contrast with Taiwanese nunnery of fifty years ago where most of the nuns just performed rituals and cooked, cleaned, swept and grew vegetables.

Wu-yin Fa-shih talks about the nuns in Taiwan fifty years ago as being very low on the social scale. People only knew that nuns were vegetarian, but knew nothing else about the nun’s life or its purpose. On a recent visit to China, she observed that to a large extent these views are still held there and that nuns are often still called ts’ai ku (vegetable sister), or ni-ku, which is not a very respectful term for a nun. She joked at the way people there often referred to nuns: “Na ke ni-ku hao p’iao-liang” (that sister is really

101 Conversation with Wu-yin Fa-shih, Hsiang-kuang Temple, October 1996.
pretty). Everyone at my interview roared with laughter at her impersonation of an uneducated lay person.

Wu-yin Fa-shih possesses a great compassionate warmth. Those who are around her speak of her kindness and concern, of her gentle humour and her far-reaching vision. Forty years after ordination, her experience is deep and her ability to guide new nuns is obviously outstanding. One testimony to her success is the number of contented and happy nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple and the very few nuns who have left. Her activities flow constantly like a stream and it is hard to find time to sit down and talk with her, although she will always make the time even if it means robbing herself of needed rest.

After she was approached by several Western bhikṣuṇīs about full ordination for Tibetan nuns, Wu-yin Fa-shih has been tireless in helping to introduce bhikṣuṇī ordination into Tibetan Buddhism, contributing to the organisation of two conferences in Taipei which I attended. She also agreed to discuss the issue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama with a small group of bhikṣuṇīs at a meeting which I and another Western bhikṣuṇī, Tenzin Daö, organised. In addition, she accepted an invitation to teach Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya to a large gathering at an historic conference for Western nuns which was held in Bodh Gaya, India in February 1996.

Clearly, Wu-yin Fa-shih’s emphasis on education and on monastic training is well-founded. She believes it is the key to a better society and that it will also ensure the continuation of the Saṃgha and the consequent continuation of Buddhism. She made a joke about Buddhism’s future: “I always think, when I die and some day I return again, will there still be Buddha’s teaching, will the Dharma exist? Will there be somebody who can teach me Buddhadharma?”
Feminist oral history is an emerging field of enquiry where rich and real life stories are told and where women are the creators of their own lives and histories. Rather than dry observations objectively and intellectually made about women, the women rightfully become the subjects of their own accounts; they share their ideas, perceptions and self-analysis. There has long been a need for the personal and experiential documentation of women’s lives and for their own enunciation of their experiences and aspirations. This section focuses on the living of the monastic life, comments being drawn from spontaneous and informal talks with many nuns, from planned interviews and group discussions. Here, the nuns express their own motivations, aims, perceptions, experiences and hardships. What do nuns think of their own lives and what do they hope to achieve by crossing over from the worldly to the renounced life? Where do they fit in society and what do they hope to offer that society?

The results of my field-work and my observations suggest that the overwhelming majority of today’s Taiwanese nuns freely choose ordination based on educated reasoning and an understanding of Buddhist principles and the nun’s life and its purpose, and that they continue to use their ordination, to a greater or lesser degree, as a tool to guide both their own and others’ lives. Taiwanese nuns, many of whom receive their final precepts at the minimum age of twenty, and many of whom, rather surprisingly, do

102 Miranda Shaw expresses this viewpoint succinctly, “How men may view women is not the primary concern of women’s history, although men are sometimes the sole topic of works that purport to be histories of women. A women’s history must seek to determine how women interpreted their own lives...” Passionate Enlightenment (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1994), p. 196.

103 All quotations used here will remain anonymous.
not have a Buddhist family background, appear highly committed to monasticism. Very few renounce the monastic way of life once they have embarked upon it.

Although the standard of nuns' monastic practice in Taiwan is high, care must be taken not to impose the transcendent ideal of monasticism as path to spiritual perfection upon every nun, an expectation which it is unreasonable to believe each nun embodies. Many nuns do exemplify moral purity, spirituality and a compassionate concern for humanity, but many surely must be content with lesser aspirations, keeping their precepts and contributing their share to temple life but having modest spiritual aims. Monasticism has traditionally had a place for people from across the spectrum of humanity: those with highly developed and clear ideas of what they want to achieve and possessing a keen sense of renunciation of worldly life; those whose understanding is more simple, yet whose practice may be very pure; those who are merely using the monastic life as a support or even as an escape. As John Kieschnick says in his commentarial book on the biographies of notable Chinese monks between the sixth and tenth centuries, *The Eminent Monk*:

> Many monks were undoubtedly motivated by a genuine revulsion for the decadence of secular society, for facile materialism, and for violence. Many no doubt carefully considered the principles by which they hoped to live. But at the same time we must recognise that no one is capable of formulating a life-style that is ethically consistent in every respect. 104

However, it is clear that the nuns' rigorous training has an effect upon even those initially ambivalent about the life and its purpose. Some of the demands of the monastic life are routine, and nuns soon become proficient in these everyday requirements and appear integrated into and fulfilled by what it has to offer, so that at first glance holiness is hard

to discern. On closer examination however, it is evident that those with a resolute and inwardly-inspired vocation, whose aims and aspirations exceed the mundane and whose actions and demeanour manifest a deep level of commitment, connect with a meaningful spirituality.

The lives and experiences of the particular nuns who are the subjects of this dissertation typically reflect those of their counterparts in other nunneries around Taiwan. Nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple are on average in their late twenties, with the youngest being 22 and the oldest 45. The majority of them received their novice precepts in their early twenties and their bhikṣuṇī precepts around two years later. Only about forty per cent come from actively Buddhist families, with a few families following Christianity, several practising traditional Chinese beliefs and the great majority not strictly following any particular belief system. About seventy per cent of the nuns are university graduates, while the remainder were either college or university students or were working when they chose to enter the temple. The majority of those who had previously held jobs were teachers or secretaries.

On being presented with my questionnaire, the nuns said they welcomed the opportunity to express themselves, to convey their thoughts and feelings and to discuss the nun’s life with another nun. Their answers to the questions reflected this openness and many nuns spent far longer than the suggested one hour in order to give full answers. They said that they accepted me: “For the first two days you were a guest, and after that you are one of us”. Because of that they took the questionnaire seriously and felt at liberty to talk at

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105 These were their ages at the time of the bulk of the interviews, October 1995. As mentioned earlier, Hsiang-kuang Temple has a policy that no woman over 35 can enter the temple. Hsiang-kuang Temple has only been operating for 25 years. As the majority of women receive their precepts around twenty years of age, it is logical that most nuns would not be over 45 years old.
length about many issues.

The aspirations and goals of the nuns are various. Many nurture the goal of ultimate enlightenment. One 39 year-old Hsiang-kuang nun, who was ordained as a bhikṣuṇī when she was 27, expressed her desire for selfless practice and the achievement of Buddhahood:

Maybe I will not become an Arhat in this life, but practising for others is the most important religious achievement. By developing one’s Buddha Nature and compassionate feelings, then one will achieve Buddha’s level. If everyday I keep my mind straight, this is the most important religious achievement. 106

Another nun stated a similar goal: “My aim is to look for a way to cultivate and be like the Buddha. I want to know clearly and deeply about meditation and see all the stages on the path to enlightenment.” 107 A third nun, 32 years old and one of the growing number of nuns in Taiwan with a doctorate, expressed her aim to become a Stream-enterer108 by the end of this life and in the meantime be a nuns’ teacher, run a nuns’ community and lead in Buddhist society.

Most of the nuns I spoke to about their aims displayed a sense of social obligation and responsibility. A 33 year-old nun who was previously a history student at university stated: “Being a bhikṣuṇī is a promise, a commitment.... If you become a nun, you must promise and make a commitment to help all beings get enlightened.” 109 Another nun explained the effect caring for others has on her: when she is not concerned with others her world is smaller, but when she thinks of others her world and its meaning are much

106 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
107 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
108 The first of the four stages to the goal of Arhatship.
109 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
more profound. She said that if she does not concern herself with other people and serve the world, then the world will not be healed or purified and this problem will then turn itself on her.

One 32 year-old who became a bhikṣuṇī when she was 24 said: "I have to learn everything and would like to produce Dharma books for society for my whole life. I would also like to publish a Buddhist magazine which will help many people to learn about Dharma."

Another nun also expressed her wish to be involved with books and has an ambition to collect the history of Buddhist institutes in Taiwan and trace monastic Buddhism's development in China and its latest transmission to Taiwan after 1945. The idea of bringing Buddhist education into mainstream Buddhist society is popular among the nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple and the goal of many of them is to lecture and teach Buddhism in institutes, universities and adult education centres. A 32 year-old bhikṣuṇī and former university student of Chinese literature said:

I first met Buddhism when I attended the university Buddhist society. I read a passage in the Diamond sūtra which affected me deeply. I didn’t know the meaning, but I wanted to find the meaning: ‘Everything is impermanent like a dream, a water bubble, a reflection in a mirror ...’ I decided I wanted to become a nun to help other people, especially to teach them Buddhadharma so that they can understand it.

Other nuns want to translate Buddhist texts. One nun, who became a bhikṣuṇī at 24 years of age, said: "I have no ambitions. I just want to be a caring person; this is no different from what ordinary people want.” Some nuns stated their aims simply in a few words: to have a kind heart, to observe the precepts purely, to work for society, to meditate well, to live an awakened life, to study more, to keep a balance between work and spiritual practice, to sleep less, to keep the mind calm and even, to achieve peace and

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110 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
111 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
equanimity, to realise the search for truth, to be self-reliant, to understand Emptiness, to develop wisdom, to know oneself, to practise Dharma, cut mental defilements and have a happy, relaxed mind.

The experience of today’s Taiwanese nuns resonates with that of the first nuns in China. Although the circumstances are not the same today as they were in the fifth and sixth centuries, where emperors and empresses were the patrons of nunneries and of exceptional nuns, nuns in Taiwan today are enjoying a status and freedom which is almost unprecedented in the recent past. Women in contemporary Taiwan have many more life choices and careers available to them than their counterparts in China fifteen centuries ago and yet, despite the widening dichotomy, they are choosing to enter monastic life in increasing numbers. Why be a nun? What does it mean, and why choose it over modern secular life? The responses of the nuns to these questions are in many respects similar, but on another level, each nun has her own unique reason. John Kieschnick states that on examination one discovers many definitions of what a monastic should be:

The official, the peasant, the erudite monk, and the novice each had markedly different ideas of what a monk should be, ideas that constantly clashed, adapted, and developed in accordance with the social interactions of everyday life. Nevertheless, the vast majority of these various ideals of monkhood are in some way related to notions of asceticism loosely defined.\(^{112}\)

Kathryn Tsai also says of the early nuns in China: “There were probably as many reasons to become a nun as there were nuns, but general motives can be identified.”\(^{113}\)

Although the general motivations and aspirations for monasticism can be classified into a

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\(^{112}\) John Kieschnick, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

few broad categories, each nun brings to her monastic path her own focus and way of practice. The decision to become a nun will usually contain an element of renunciation, embryonic or well-developed and, according to Kieschnick, "any set of values in which renunciation plays a central role is of necessity in a constant dialectic with mainstream values." It is clear therefore, that by deciding to be a nun, a woman is placing herself outside of society's normal expectations to a certain degree, and that only somebody with some understanding of the Buddhist path and the purpose of monasticism can maintain such a commitment for a lifetime. From the moment of her initial decision to embark upon it, which decision is usually based on a measure of understanding of the path and its demands, to the hard training which prepares her for full ordination, the potential nun becomes well acquainted and familiar with the life. This preparation and training itself serves as an initial selection process even before she has to face her abbess and her future preceptor.

One 33 year-old nun from Hsiang-kuang Temple, who became a novice nun at the age of 22, described her experience of renunciation of the world this way:

When I was at university I wanted to search for 'the truth' and I felt that the Buddha's teaching would help me to do this. I also felt it would help people to live a better life. My friends were always talking about shopping, clothes, careers, travel and so on. I thought this was empty and meaningless. I felt I lacked something and I did not feel satisfied. I thought that having this feeling was alright, and after I became a nun, I thought about the girls I knew at university who had a lack of thinking about life, and I strongly believed that the Buddha's teaching will lead to a better life. Now I understand that Buddhism has taught me to know myself better.

Another nun echoed these sentiments about worldly life:

When I was fifteen, I looked at a picture of myself and thought I looked like a nun.

114 John Kieschnick, op. cit., p. 16.
115 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
One time I was at a party where everyone was very happy, and I suddenly felt lost, as if something were missing. My parents were already dead and I thought, "Where am I going?" I asked myself, "Why do people get married?" It seemed that people want to find themselves, but they get married, get busy and then complain. Actually, they lose themselves. I felt there must be another way to live. When I first became a nun, I didn't understand Dharma, but just depended on my Master. 116

A university graduate said of the lack of meaning in worldly pursuits:

I have always wanted to understand 'the truth'. When I was young I liked to paint and to study and I achieved high grades. I always did my best. When I was successful I got what I wanted, but I felt strongly that something was missing. I had this experience many times and I discovered that all these things and achievements were not satisfying. I came to Hsiang-kuang Temple to find the answer inside myself, that there is something true. I am always searching, thinking very deeply and questioning. 117

An understanding of the fundamentals of Buddhism which describe karma, impermanence and the suffering inherent in the secular world of ‘red dust’ (hung ch‘en) and the path to freedom from that suffering also characterises most nuns’ entry into monastic life:

At College I joined a Buddhist society and I thought that Buddhism was good. Around that time, some of my friends and family died and this made me realise that everything is impermanent. I felt that I could change my fate because Buddha’s teachings show that through understanding karma, the present circumstances are a result of past causes. I feel I now understand the reasons for the present and I can create the right conditions for the future. 118

Monasticism provides the ideal circumstance in which to train in the first basic practice of a Buddhist, that is, ethics. It also offers an environment which monastics recognise as being optimally conducive to concentration and wisdom, the fruits of ethics. Furthermore, most Chinese nunneries and monasteries in Taiwan today present Buddhist education curricula and organise welfare programs and religious activities for the wider

116 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
117 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
118 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
society as a whole. Thus, Taiwanese monastics have created for themselves the opportunity to put into practice another of Buddhism’s principle tenets, service with compassion, and many nuns cite serving society as a major motivating factor in their ordination: “A nun should do something significant for others. To be a nun is to offer myself to Buddhism and all beings. This is better than living for myself or just for a few people.”

Jien-shen Fa-shih, who herself is a Hsiang-kuang nun and has studied in the United States, also stresses in her M.S. thesis the essential role of monastics within society:

The primary mission of monastics is to pursue Buddha’s teaching and educate all the lives in the world to do the same. According to these two basic purposes, monastics can be in different positions doing various jobs to serve the society and transmit the Buddhist spirit. Despite the progressive effort in spreading Buddhism, monastics need to keep a renouncing mind. To keep secularization from overthrowing Buddhist undertakings, monastics need the disciplined life offered by organized monasteries and systematic training in institutes. The special clothing, lifestyle, daily regulations all differentiate monastics from lay people. Most of all, monastics have to learn to be independent of secular attachments.

In short, today’s monastics keep a leaving-the-world mind to make in-the-world efforts. The ultimate purpose of Buddhist practice is to help self and others achieve complete freedom and wisdom by abandoning all secular desires as well as performing all good deeds to benefit other beings...The monastics of today need to be more conscious of the existence of the outside world and their relationship with it. In other words, monastic society affects and is affected by other societies. Every monastic has to develop the abilities and responsibility as a member of the whole human society...Since the revival of Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan forty years ago, Buddhist monastics have tried to successfully play the role of Buddha’s followers. Today’s monastics cannot choose ch‘u-chia as a way to escape from the realities of life. Before achieving complete enlightenment in individual life, every monastic has a serious responsibility to his/her religious community and society.

The attitudes and lives of Taiwanese nuns generally indicate a complementarity between their monastic lives of training, practice and study, which they have chosen for their own
spiritual growth, and the responsibility they feel to contribute to society. The former prepares and nourishes them for the latter and, as such, both life in the temple and work within society are intertwined and mutually interdependent.

Many of the nuns in this field-study described meaningful and sometimes devastating, personal experiences concerning themselves, family members or close friends which propelled them towards an ordained life. In addition, when questioned about their alternative choice if ordination had not been available, almost all nuns expressed an adamant certainty to remain celibate, study Buddhism teach others or do social work. One nun even exclaimed in all earnestness that she would kill herself if she could not be a nun. This intensity of feeling for the ordained life and the monastic precepts harks back to the early nuns of the Pi-ch’iu-ni chuan, who joyfully forsook family life and renounced good food, comfort, sleep and other worldly concerns in their pursuit of the ultimate goal. It is interesting that one nun, who enjoys the disciplined life of a nun, stated that she would be a soldier if she could not be a nun, because the same regimentation, group life, wearing of a uniform and daily routine regulate both ways of life. She also noted with a wry smile that the two are characterised by different mind-sets.

Some nuns, having watched their parents struggle with the difficulties of family life, worldly work and financial burden, and with what appeared to them to be futile endeavours, felt that they could not embark upon a life like that. One nun, a graduate in world history, described the nun’s life, free of worldly distraction, in this way:

Nuns don’t have the kinds of problems which lay people have. A bhikṣuṇī is a renunciant, and therefore can cut off many distractions. Because of not having a family, she can put her full concentration into spiritual development. A bhikṣuṇī can propagate Dharma and do Buddha’s work. I feel that I have managed to achieve my
Other nuns described their first, often childhood, experience of seeing bhikṣuṇīs and of being impressed by their grace and wisdom. One nun said that she noticed how happy the bhikṣuṇīs appeared to be and that this caused her to think about being a nun. Several nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple described meeting Cheng-yen Fa-shih of Hualien and being moved to take ordination by her compassion, her dignity and her words of encouragement. A small number of women were encouraged by their Buddhist parents to enter monastic life. One nun remembers being taken to a local temple by her mother when she was six years old. On their return home, her mother said to her, “I want you to be the daughter of Kuan-yin Bodhisattva.” She remembers feeling very happy about that and, although it is not customary, she later became a novice and then a bhikṣuṇī in the same year, when she was 25 years old.

As a larger proportion of nuns come from non-Buddhist or nominally Buddhist families, parental encouragement is uncommon. It is more common for parents to react with tearful sadness and, on occasions, even to oppose the ordination of their daughters, sometimes with great hostility. One nun, who received her bhikṣuṇī precepts when she was 27, spoke of her parents’ lack of understanding of her choice:

> My parents regard becoming a nun as shameful in this society and they feel they have lost a daughter. After my ordination, they wanted to take me home and my father cried. Many times since then they have come to the temple to try and take me away.

I heard many stories of young nuns who ran away from parents or husbands to join a temple. One nun, on frequent occasions, had to be hidden in or outside the temple to

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121 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
122 See page 78 for a description of Cheng-yen Fa-shih and her activities.
123 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
avoid her father's wrath as he stormed fulminating into the temple searching for her. Some of these stories also compare with those nuns of early Chinese Buddhism whose tales of faith and sacrifice continue to awe their modern sisters.

Another strong-minded young nun told me how she was touched by the Buddhist teachings and felt compelled to leave her adoring husband for the nunnery. His kindness and generosity in permitting her to do so moved her deeply and even as she recounted the story of the last day of her ordination to me her own eyes filled with tears of gratitude. She told me that as she stood quite alone in the Buddha Hall experiencing some trepidation at the enormous step she had taken, her husband, who had viewed the final ceremony with other families, was suddenly beside her, weeping. He congratulated her and pledged to offer her help whenever she should need it. Later a friend of his told the new nun that, as he left the temple, he had stood alone on a traditional Chinese bridge near the temple entrance and leaning on its railing, he had given vent to his grief in a dramatic way. The nun herself says that his gentleness was an agony which was harder to bear than the anger of others.

Clearly, there are also nuns who enter the monastic life at a later time in their lives, either because they are widowed, divorced or even abandoned or abused, or simply because their families have grown up and left home. At an ordination platform in Taiwan, I encountered one woman in her sixties who had run away from her home in America with the sole purpose of becoming a nun. She told me she had not informed her children who, she said, would have tried to prevent her. What she did not count on, however, was that a few days later, a San Francisco-based Chinese newspaper published photographs of the ordination in which she was clearly visible. I witnessed the arrival of a large group of her
children and their spouses and offspring at the temple, their initial panic at the sight of their shaven-headed mother, and what appeared to be the dawning of respect and admiration which followed as they all prostrated themselves at her feet.

Despite family opposition and other obstacles, every one of the nuns I spoke with described the great feeling of well-being and benefit they derive from their lives as nuns. Most believe that they know themselves better since their ordination and that their understanding of monasticism and the disciplined life of precepts has positively changed their attitudes and behaviour. One Hsiang-kuang nun who had studied computer engineering at university said:

> Since I have become a nun I know myself more deeply than before, I am more compassionate to others and I know how to maintain and keep a monastery running. My knowledge of the Buddhist precepts helps me keep my life going in the right direction. But I am still learning, and I feel that the nun’s career is the most important work I have done in my life. 124

One nun, who has been a bhikṣunī since she was 22 said: “My personality has grown. Being a nun is the only choice for me. I would not wish to do anything else and I want to be a nun so strongly that I have no thought of anything else.” Another nun, who became a bhikṣunī when she was 24, also expressed her happiness with the ordained life and the chance it offers for nuns to involve themselves with work for society:

> Since becoming a nun I know myself, both my body and mind, more clearly. It is quite different from when I was a laywoman. I find that now my troubles are becoming less. I have discovered that there is a clear method to decrease troubles, and I find that I have a deep feeling to contribute and do service for others. This willingness has become stronger than when I was a laywoman. 125

Another nun agreed:

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124 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
125 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
A nun is also a member of society and has a duty to society. Apart from ending personal troubles, purifying the mind and becoming an Arhat, a nun must also help society to correct themselves and have a better life. Look to the Buddha, what did he do? He purified himself and then came back to society and taught beings to purify themselves and be educated in body, mind and thinking. This is what I want to do.126

Other nuns stated that ordination offers them a much better opportunity to purify their minds and reach enlightenment than they had as laywomen:

Living as a nun means that I can do anything according to Buddha’s teaching to practise Dharma and reach enlightenment. The nun’s life offers the chance to cut the defilements, to realise impermanence and to become enlightened. It is possible to have a happy mind and do everything here [at the nunnery].127

This sentiment was also summed up by a Hsiang-kuang nun who, after studying English and philosophy at university, received her bhikṣuṇī precepts when she was 28. She simply said: “Life as a nun is the foundation for being enlightened. The nun’s life is the basic element.” A bhikṣuṇī and former primary school teacher also described the nun’s life as offering the opportunity to purify the mind of delusions:

At the beginning I wasn’t clear how to be a nun, but one thing was sure, every day I improved and made progress. Now I have confidence about the nun’s life. My abilities have gradually evolved and when I look carefully at my troubles, I can see they have grown less. I think troubles come about because of mental emotions, and I understand that we perceive the world as confusing because of mental emotions. Being a bhikṣuṇī can lessen those mental emotions.128

A couple of nuns in the study, while enjoying monastic life and apparently not regretting their choice, expressed dismay at the amount of seemingly ordinary work which occupies their time leaving little opportunity for meditation. This is an issue which arose more than once during my conversations with the nuns. One nun discussed the dilemma she faces

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126 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
127 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
128 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
over the amount of time and energy demanded by the project she is involved in:

My main problem is analysing whether the work I am doing, which is a very big task and which is time and energy consuming, is worthwhile, or whether doing more meditation would be more beneficial to myself and others. Over four years, I have researched and written three volumes of a 24-set collection which will contain the history and development of Buddhist educational institutes in Taiwan. It is an enormous task and I feel that all my energy has gone into it. I feel great suffering as I have not had any time to read the Buddha’s teaching or do meditation. From morning until night, I am so busy. The work is very hard and I feel my life is fractured as I have to travel from temple to temple to gather information. The struggle which I constantly face is, is this work really necessary for the Buddha? I want to meditate, but I also feel that if I do this work, then Buddha’s teaching can stay in the world. I know the work is worthwhile, but what relevance does it have to religious activity? I keep searching for the answer to this question. If I can find its relevance, that this work is a religious activity, I will continue it, if not I will give it up.129

Other nuns also place almost impossibly high standards upon themselves:

I want to study and meditate more, but I must do the work for the community and contribute to temple duties. It is difficult to achieve a balance between work and practice. In the community, as a nun, each person is expected to improve their behaviour, increase their abilities and get better and better. I feel that people make demands like this upon me and sometimes I feel oppressed by it. Am I okay? I feel that when I was a lay person I was okay, but after becoming a nun I am no good. I lack ability. It is difficult to work this situation out.130

Whether they are searching for enlightenment, seeking to understand themselves better, to lessen mental delusions, to increase their knowledge of Buddhism, to contribute to society, or even to weigh up the usefulness of their work, all the nuns in the study, even those with personal questions, demonstrated enthusiasm for monastic life, describing its benefits and usefulness and its relevance within modern society.

When I asked them what they found the hardest about being a nun, they only mentioned small personal difficulties which they are trying to overcome such as being tired and

129 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
130 Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
wanting to stay in bed, being afraid of public speaking or not wanting to dress formally in hot weather. The majority of them used my question as a form of self-examination and talked about the difficulties associated with calming the mind, working out the best way of helping others, changing old habits, eliminating pride and other mental delusions, and having to spend time with worldly people. Several nuns also complained about the difficulty of putting into practice the Buddha’s teaching and achieving Buddhahood itself, both of which are sublime goals not attained without a struggle.

I discussed the lack of bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Tibetan nuns’ tradition and the recent concern of many Taiwanese nuns over this issue with the nuns of Hsiang-kuang Temple. All the nuns who were part of this study expressed their views unanimously on the importance of full ordination as a bhikṣuṇī for those women who have access to it and are qualified to receive it:

Being a bhikṣuṇī is important because bhikṣuṇīs have the right to discuss and decide Saṃgha events. A bhikṣuṇī can make improvements. Buddha said that a novice is not a nun. Being a bhikṣuṇī also increases the opportunities for practicing Dharma. 131

Another bhikṣuṇī, who has been ordained for over fifteen years, concurred:

In the Saṃgha, a novice is not admitted, but a bhikṣuṇī is. The bhikṣuṇī has the right to discuss matters concerning the Saṃgha and to decide Saṃgha issues. Novicehood alone is not complete, as there is a process described in the chieh-lü. So it is best to complete that process. 132

Another twenty year-old bhikṣuṇī, who arrived at Hsiang-kuang Temple when she was seventeen to begin preparing for ordination and who begged successfully to be allowed to stay when Wu-yin Fa-shih told her she was too young and should return in three years,
also spoke of the ordination process:

I only discovered the difference between novices and bhikṣuṇīs after my novice ordination. Chinese nuns mostly don't think about whether becoming a bhikṣuṇi is best. In Chinese Buddhism it is just a process and there is no problem with full ordination as there is for Tibetan nuns. My only problem to consider was whether the Hsiang-kuang Saṃgha would accept me or not.\textsuperscript{133}

Their principal observations were that a novice is not really a nun, but is only training to be a nun. As such her possibilities are limited. Both within the Saṃgha community and in the wider society she is seen as being on a preparatory transitional stage, lacking the qualifications to take part in monastic decisions. One nun described the relative situation of the novice and the bhikṣuṇī this way: “A bhikṣuṇī is an adult in Buddhism; a novice is only a child.” Another said: “A novice cannot teach Dharma. A bhikṣuṇī is formally a nun, but a novice is not.” A third nun said that novices are not part of the four categories of Buddhist followers. Novicehood is meant to be temporary, while being a lay person or fully ordained is recognised as a lifelong form of adherence to Buddhist practice.

Coupled with a commitment to what the nuns see as a widely beneficial and edifying way of life, is their profound faith in the words of the Buddha and in the path he mapped out for monks and nuns. Faith sustains their conviction in the validity of their lives and their determination to joyfully continue those lives as nuns. One of the senior bhikṣuṇī teachers at Hsiang-kuang Temple said: “If you don’t know yourself, you know nothing.” However, the faith of the nuns which clearly underpins their expressions of devotion and reverence and which motivates and propels their daily activities, manifests itself in a visible sense of stability and constancy, as if they do know themselves and their purpose.

\textsuperscript{133} Personal interview, Hsiang-kuang Ssu, October 1995.
1 CULTURAL CONTEXT AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Unlike the situation of Buddhist nuns in pre-Communist China and post-1949 Taiwan described in Section II of the dissertation, where the origin and development of the bhikṣuṇī lineage has been historically well documented, and where the lives of bhikṣuṇīs have been thoroughly described as according with Vinaya tradition, it appears unlikely that there was ever a transmission of the bhikṣuṇī (dge-slong-ma) lineage to Tibet. Scant material is available even about the founding and development of the Tibetan novice order of śramaṇerikā (dge-tshul-ma). In addition to the novice nuns of Tibet, it is certain there were also many adept non-monastic female practitioners living solitary or semi-solitary existences in the high isolated valleys and mountains of Tibet since Buddhism's introduction into that country in the eighth century CE.

Several such women of distinction were the great eighth century yoginī Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal (Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal) and a number of practitioners such as Machig Lapdron (Madcig Lab-sgron) (1055-1145), Nangsa Obum (sNang-sa 'Od-bum), who was her contemporary, and the great seventeenth century Jetsunma, Mingyur Paldron (rJe-btsun Mi-'gyur dPal-sgron). Their experiences and dedicated practice were and continue to be

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1 A female practitioner of tantric meditation. The term yogi is used to denote male practitioners, while yogin is a gender-neutral term.

2 Her biography has been well documented elsewhere. See Keith Dowman, Sky Dancer, The Secret Life and Songs of the Lady Ye-shes mTso-rgyal (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984), and Tarthang Tulku (tr.) Mother of Knowledge, the Enlightenment of Ye-shes mTso-rgyal (Dharma Publishing, Berkeley, 1983).

a great inspiration to Buddhist women both inside and out of Tibet. Despite the fact that they tended to live lives of solitude and contemplation and did not usually seek to collect disciples or become well-known, many of their life stories (rnam-thar), both as straight biography and as hagiography, exist in the texts or as oral tradition and are beginning to become available to the Western reader since the first translations began appearing in the early 1980s.

But leaving aside these inspirational historical figures and also the growing number of yoginī practitioners and enthusiastic young nuns who are again endeavouring to practise religion in present-day occupied Tibet, it is the contemporary order of exile ordained women in Tibetan Buddhism that is of concern here. Their communities largely occur in India, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. It is their interpretation and practice of Vinaya and monastic discipline as a useful system which continues to fulfil an important need, and their lives, aspirations and self-perceptions which interest us and to which this section will be devoted, after a brief historical discussion of the emergence of a tradition of novice nuns in Tibet and their situation within Tibetan society, culture and Buddhism.

1. The Advent of Nuns in Tibetan Buddhism

It is not certain when the first novice nuns made their appearance in Tibet, although there is mention in The Blue Annals (Deb-ther sngon-po) of 24 śramaṇērikās during the years 1097-1117 CE. Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedor, makes the point in her short Vinaya Survey that from the context, these novices were not the first, however, she states that

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4 Yoginīs do not usually hold vows of celibacy, whereas, strictly speaking according to Vinaya, nuns observe the Prātimokṣa code of discipline which includes celibacy.

nobody has been able to ascertain when or by whom the first Tibetan śramaṇerikā was ordained. According to another source, the first nunnery was established in the eleventh century at Phenpo (‘Phan-po), north of Lhasa, which would be consistent with the dates mentioned in The Blue Annals.

The first ordination of indigenous Tibetans as bhikṣus is well documented, however, and took place at Tibet's first great monastery of Samye (bSam-yas) in Central Tibet (gTsang) in the late eighth century with the renowned Indian Ācārya Śāntarakṣita assuming the role of abbot (T. mkhan-po; Skt. upādhyāya). The Vinaya tradition into which they were ordained was the Mūlasarvāstivāda (gShi thams-cad yod-par smra-ba), one of the seven schools said to be contained within the Sarvāstivāda School (Thams-cad yod-par smra-ba), and which Tibetan monasticism continues to follow to the present day. The Tibetan texts are the only ones which preserve the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya in its entirety.

2. The Position of Women and Nuns within Tibetan Society

The circumstances surrounding Tibet's recent history and adaptation to the twentieth century are unique for several reasons, all of which have a bearing on the traditional position of women and thereby the position of nuns in Tibetan society and culture.

Firstly, due to its particularly isolated geographical situation and lack of political relationship with foreign countries, Tibet had very little contact with the outside world and had developed its own hierarchical systems of government and society to a large extent...
independently of external influences. Tibet was following a way of life out of step with the emerging realities of the twentieth century.

Within these systems the position of women was, as with other Asian societies, lower than that of men. They had few educational possibilities and although men and women appeared to share domestic responsibilities, women were almost completely excluded from political and government positions and professional roles. The appearance of women in leading political positions, either in the Tibetan government-in-exile or as Tibetan representatives in overseas Offices of Tibet, is a fairly recent development.

There is a scarcity of written information concerning the position of women in Tibetan society, which makes the work of examining women's socio-historical role very difficult. As for female monastics, as Janice Willis succinctly states:

(n)o indigenous Tibetan literature, of whatever historical period, focuses upon them. Moreover only the most scant attention has been paid to them in the very recent past. Yet the ani tradition has managed to survive.

Almost all material has to be gleaned from oral sources, which may or may not be reliable

8 Hanna Havnevik has obtained information about a couple of nuns who held positions in the political and administrative spheres. She also mentions several famous nuns who were freedom fighters in recent times. See her anthropological study of Tibetan nuns, Tibetan Buddhist Nuns (Norwegian University Press, 1989), p. 83. See also "The Tibetan Women's Uprising", Cho-Yang, No. 5, 1992, pp. 51-60. In this article, Russell and Singeri present documented accounts of the Lhasa Women's Uprising in 1959 which was led by a powerful and capable woman, Pamo Kusang. Her name and the names of other women and nuns who led subsequent demonstrations during the Chinese Cultural Revolution have already become a part of the folk history of Tibet.

9 Barbara Nimri Aziz, recognising the lack of sociological information concerning Tibet, and in particular the women of Tibet, is working to change this situation. See her article, "Moving Towards a Sociology of Tibet", Tibet Journal, Vol. 12, No. 4: 72-86, 1987.

10 Janice D. Willis, "Tibetan Ani-s" in Feminine Ground (Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY), 1989, p. 99. a-ne (colloquial: ani) also means 'aunt' and is a somewhat impolite term of address for a nun. The appellation 'chôma' (chos-ma), which is a more respectful term, is also used for nuns but not exclusively, as it also means 'female practitioner' in general. The terms 'tsunma' (btsun-ma) and 'chöla' (chos-lags) are both employed as respectful forms of address for nuns.
and which vary according to which socio-economic class and geographical area the informant belongs.

It is clear, however, that in contrast to Tibet's Asian neighbours, women within Tibetan society could have considerable personal freedom in some areas if they so chose. Gender roles were not rigidly defined and there existed the possibility for women to hold substantial economic autonomy and significant power and control within the household. Women shared with men in the three activities associated with Tibet's traditional mixed economy: agriculture, animal husbandry and trade, and they often held major decision-making authority in trade. Although such freedoms were influenced by the social class to which they belonged, women were also generally able to make some choices with regard to marriage, the division of labour and lifetime vocation often denied their counterparts in other Asian countries. In Tibet the humiliating and oppressive assaults on women's freedom of foot-binding, veiling, dowry or concubinage were never imposed.\(^\text{11}\)

Despite the degree of latitude and independence afforded them, Tibetan women were, and in many cases continue to be very self-effacing and passive, preferring to keep quiet rather than challenge male domination, even though they may be aware of the traditional inequalities prevalent in their society. Mrs. Rinchen Khadro Choegyal, Education Minister (bKa-blon) in the Tibetan government-in-exile, says of this situation:

> I feel that our women can discover themselves much more and broaden their views. Some tend to be content with very little, while they could be much more ambitious and strive for higher objectives.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\) "Tibetan Women: Oppression and Discrimination in Occupied Tibet", National Report on Tibetan Women, issued by the Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India for the 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, September 4-15, 1995.

The same attitudes also continue to pervade the population of female monastics. Rinchen Khadro goes on to say:

...when I saw Tibetan women dressed as nuns and going up and down, I used to try and ask them something about religion in the hope of learning something from them. But very often I was disappointed because they would have very little to say. I felt that this was not good - if you are a nun you must know what you are doing, you really have to know why you have become a nun.  

There have, however, never been institutions for the religious education and training of nuns, in contrast with the long-established and highly developed system of religious education for monks. Through history Tibetan nuns have had to be content with rudimentary religious study, chanting of memorised prayers and meditation, all of which can be accomplished without the acquisition of such skills as reading and writing. This, perhaps, is one reason why many nuns and female practitioners retreated to the mountains to engage in meditative practices, living alone or in small groups under a teacher. The fruits of this kind of practice were often rich and profound.

Sacred biographies of such wise women: nuns, yoginis and ďākinī-emanations, have been instrumental in arousing the faith of women practitioners down to the present day. But in organised monastic life it was the males who had the monopoly on Tibetan Buddhist metaphysics, advanced learning, acquisition of such titles as geshe (dge-shes) (Doctor of Divinity), and the assumption of authoritative and influential roles within the monastic system.

Tibet had an enormous monastic population before 1959. At over half a million, it was

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13 *ibid.*, p. 40.
14 The ďākinī (mka'-'gro-ma) literally, "sky-goer", is traditionally regarded as a female spiritual being who protects the Buddhist doctrine and helps religious practitioners. An emanation is an incarnation of such a tantric deity or being who can be seen by an ordinary person.
arguably the largest in the Buddhist world. According to Tibetan government-in-exile sources, there were about 27,000 nuns in 818 nunneries by 1959, more than 270 of which housed considerable populations. They have never constituted a major component of Buddhism in Tibet, however. Thus, although women could become religious practitioners, their position was low, they received minimal support and encouragement and their life was extremely hard. Tsering Tsomo confirms this situation in her article, "Women in Tibetan Society":

although the number of monks (was) greater than nuns, becoming a nun provide(d) an alternative and positive role for women. However, nuns have been disadvantaged not only in terms of numbers, but also in their status. In the formal religious hierarchy, monks rank higher than nuns.

Because nuns have been denied the traditional religious education which has always been the natural birthright of monks, and because there has never been an established bhikṣuṇī tradition in Tibet, they have never had the means to attain equality with the monks and gain access to higher levels of religious knowledge and accomplishment. This educational deprivation has, on the whole, kept their spiritual development, independence

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15 Surveys indicated that in 1733 there were 319,270 monks in Central Tibet and Kham. See Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951* (University of California Press, 1989), p. 21. Goldstein also talks of monasticism in Tibet being a "mass phenomenon", differing from the monasticism of other Buddhist traditions. He points out that the large monasteries frequently supported populations of whom, in many cases, over two-thirds were not even pursuing religious textual study (p. 24). Detailed research by the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs of H.H. the Dalai Lama indicates that in 1950 there were 600,094 monks, nuns and yogis.


17 See Hanna Havnevik, *op cit.*, p. 78, for exceptions to this situation. There did exist in Tibet prior to 1959 one female incarnation, Samding Dorje Pagmo, Abbess of Samding Monastery, who was recognised by the Tibetan Government. There were also a very small number of female lineage-holders and other incarnations who were only recognised within their own lineages and schools. However, these examples pale in comparison with the overwhelming numbers of male incarnations and they cannot constitute of themselves enough evidence to suggest that women religious practitioners were an acknowledged force.

and self-confidence firmly in check. It has prevented their rise to positions of authority, as well as creating an acute lack of female role models for female religious practitioners. Consequently, they continue to rely largely upon male teachers who may knowingly or otherwise place male gender-bias upon their interpretation of the scriptures and upon their dealings with the nuns.

Traditionally, both in Tibet and in exile, many nunneries were connected with monasteries, rendering the nuns subservient to the monks economically, spiritually and with regard to monastic chores and obligations. An androcentric view of monasticism on the part of the monk hierarchy, has led to the widespread attitude that nuns' practice is comparatively unimportant.

The second factor contributing to Tibet's unusual adaptation to the twentieth century was that the process of reform and modernisation in many areas of Tibetan life, including religion, monasticism and education, which had been begun by the thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933) in the latter part of his life, travelled an uncertain and interrupted road. This process was curtailed by his death in 1933. The possibility of organic, internally-generated modernisation, which might have included improved education and religious opportunities for the nuns, was ended by the invasion mounted by the Chinese Communists in 1950 and the repressive measures that followed, especially after 1959.

Religious enthusiasm among women within Tibet continues despite, or as a reaction

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19 For a discussion of the applicability and relevance of adept women of the past as adequate role models for the present, see Rita Gross, "Yeshe Tsogyel: Enlightened Consort, Great Teacher, Female Role Model", in Feminine Ground, pp. 11-32.

20 Anna Grimshaw describes this situation of all-pervading subservience very graphically in Servants of the Buddha (Open Letter Publishers, London, 1992), an account of time she spent living in a Ladakhi nunnery which was attached to the neighbouring monastery of Rizong.
against, the repressive Chinese presence.\textsuperscript{21} The number of nuns and of re-established nunneries, albeit fewer than before 1950, is quite surprising in view of the current Communist religious policy.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, today's nuns in Tibet, political in sentiment and growing stronger and more defiant after years of adversity and religious prohibition, are troublesome thorns in the side of the Chinese occupiers. It has been nuns who have organised at least half of the pro-independence demonstrations in Tibet since 1987 and nuns who are the most brutally tortured when arrested. They stand up to that torture with remarkable resilience.\textsuperscript{23}

Thirdly, with the massive exodus of Tibetans into exile, an entirely new social structure has had to be established. Families and social groups, often in tatters, have had to be slowly reconstructed, and the Tibetans in the diaspora have had to create new lives in radically different surroundings. Predictably, religious life has also been affected and both nuns and monks in exile have had to begin from scratch to build nunneries and monasteries and adapt monastic routines and study structures within the context of present-day India.

This newly-created environment, where many archaic and regressive elements have been naturally eliminated, could be seen as the ideal place to reassess the position of the nuns and upgrade their social standing and education, both religious and secular. Many of the

\textsuperscript{21} For an interesting and informative account of nuns in present-day Tibet, see "Nuns in Tibet Today", \textit{Cho-Yang}, No. 6, 1994, pp. 99-110.

\textsuperscript{22} For summaries of current Chinese religious policy, see the Tibetan government-in-exile's Human Rights Updates, regularly compiled and circulated by the Department of Information and International Relations, Dharamsala.

new nunneries are reflecting this change and the nuns themselves are slowly beginning to recognise the urgency of the situation and the need to take charge of their own lives. These developments in exile can also be viewed as being an unintended positive result of the Communist invasion.

Joining in this growing movement for religious fulfilment and equality in exile are newly­arrived nuns from Tibet, who continue to escape in large numbers by making the arduous and, for some, fatal trek over the Himalaya. Many of these nuns have been active in pro­independence demonstrations in Tibet or have been in prison and, in a sense, are the representatives of the new breed of political nun. The majority of them are young, some have a secular education and themselves point out that they, along with the monks, are the most obvious group to lead demonstrations as they are independent and without immediate family members who risk reprisals as a result of their activities. In exile, their bravery and dedication are evident in their commitment to the task of building their own nunneries and learning to read, write and undertake religious study and debate, a domain previously reserved for monks, with an enthusiasm relatively rare among the more conventional long-term exiles. Their influence is undoubtedly a positive development.

However, there still remain numerous communities of nuns in dire poverty and need in the outlying areas of Ladakh, Zanskar, Spiti and the eastern Himalaya.

In the course of my conversations and interviews with a wide range of Tibetans, it became clear that their opinions and attitudes on the position of women and the roles of nuns differed according to their individual social standing and experience. Aristocrats, who have themselves had a good education and have subsequently made their own life choices, generally believe that the position of women in Tibetan society was and is good
and that nuns have had almost the same opportunities as monks and are regarded equally. At the same time, most informants acknowledged the need for improvement in the level of education of the nuns and expressed support for their bid for full ordination.

One government official described Tibetans as having a 'notion' of women's abilities as being less than men's, and of this 'notion' as being a 'preconception' rather than the reality. He linked the general Tibetan attitude regarding the position of nuns to preconceived beliefs:

> Whatever the misconception is, when you have such a one, and it runs into society and it becomes a tradition and a habit, if it is not rectified, it permeates right through society at all levels, both lay and monastic. If nuns had been able to study and learn Vinaya, they would have been able to say they were not inferior and to stand up for their rights. But they and society took their inferiority for granted. From generation to generation, and even among previous Dalai Lamas, their problem was never pointed out in the past; society followed along with that. There was never a chance to change it and very few examples to show that it did not need to be like that. 24

He went on to say that he does not believe Tibetans rank nuns as highly as monks, that there are fewer opportunities and no nun scholars. Furthermore, charity was never extended to nuns in the same way that it is to monks. He believes that, because of the abundance of derogatory nun jokes, society has, in a subtle way, lost confidence in nuns and then nuns have lost confidence in themselves. They believe their main purpose is to recite prayers for other people. They do not even entertain the idea of becoming scholars.

He firmly believes that the change needs to come from both sides with the monks removing their bias and the nuns becoming 'revolutionaries' to change their own situation from the inside.

A teacher at the Tibetan Children’s Village in Dharamsala expressed to me his view that

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24 Personal interview, Dharamsala, March, 1996.
taking hold of opportunities is the responsibility of the individual. He said that nobody is forcibly depriving anyone of opportunities and choices, and that each nun should put herself forward and be decisive. He used the example of Tibetan women expressing their need for opportunities but of failing to create their own. The Tibetan Women's Association, founded as a result of the 1959 Women's Uprising in Lhasa which immediately followed the Lhasa Uprising of March 10, was not revived in exile by the general mass of women, but by the Tibetan Youth Congress which, at the time, consisted mostly of men. Again, in the Tibetan Youth Congress, it was not the women, but the men who formed a Tibetan Women's Cell to encourage women to join. He believes that nuns should assert themselves, articulate their needs and be outspoken in pushing for their own rights. He also added that the Ganden Throneholder (the head of the Gelukpa lineage) could just as easily be a nun.

A woman shopkeeper in Dharamsala believes the situation for nuns in exile is significantly better than in Tibet, and that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is encouraging the nuns to study, debate and sit for the Geshe degree. She also said that in some cases the nuns have stronger and more pure motives for following the religious life than the monks and that quality is of paramount importance in order to gain the respect of lay Buddhists. Despite the strong motives which nuns may have, however, a past abbot of Ganden Chöling Nunnery described the demeanour of the nuns during study as being a hindrance to their progress:

With respect to the degree of intelligence, that's an individual thing (not based on gender), but there is a great difference in the way or conduct of study. The nuns are so unaggressive, so reserved about their knowledge, some of them have knowledge and understanding but they never ask questions, or express their knowledge. In what are supposed to be confrontative discussions they always bend their heads and remain very ... quiet and very humble. Their knowledge never comes out. This is a very
Another Dharamsala shopkeeper, who has encountered animosity for his radical views, summed up Tibetan society in one sentence: "the young are very unaware, the old are very conservative; Tibetan society is not a society where people speak up." This attitude was certainly confirmed by my interview with an old, erudite and renowned geshe, who simply said, "I don't know" to my questions concerning nuns' Vinaya and the situation in Tibetan nunneries. One revealing comment that he did make, however, was that monks always just thought the nuns were "doing their thing" and that nobody ever checked. This appears to indicate a careless apathy and lack of communication on everybody's part. Clearly, complacency and indifference are key factors in the seeming impasse in which the nuns are caught.

It is my observation that the historical and socio-cultural bias which has traditionally existed in Tibetan society, of which one significant and long-term consequence has been the reticence of women in general and of nuns in particular, also continues to impact on their existence in other ways. Although secular education in Tibet was principally limited to privileged aristocrats, in exile it has generally continued to be fragmentary and unsystematic for both monks and nuns. This flaw contributes to an ongoing lack of broad global view which, if it were counteracted, would reveal the possibilities for both monks and nuns to widen their monastic experience and to engage in social service.

In contrast with their counterparts in Taiwan, Tibetan nuns and, indeed, many monks remain largely ignorant of the tremendous potential of ordination and of how useful for

25 Interview with Khen Rinpoche, former abbot of Ganden Chöling, December 1992, Dharamsala. (name of interviewer not recorded).
society an ordained monastic can and should be. They do not generally have any experience of other monastic traditions and have no opportunity to make comparisons. They have rarely expressed initiative or ventured opinions about social and other issues and others do not encourage them to do so, perhaps not even intentionally. This passivity and lack of self-confidence and self-expression has led to their immobility.

Passivity could also be posited as one reason for the relative absence of bhikṣunīs in Tibet and for the failure of a bhikṣunī lineage to establish itself, despite the fact that there did exist bhikṣunī communities in eastern Tibet. In early Chinese Buddhism, nuns appeared to possess great strength and determination, which is clearly evidenced in their insistence to create a bhikṣunī tradition and to ensure correct procedures. Chinese nuns took the initiative to consult Vinaya texts and to seek out ways to rectify certain faults in their initial ordination procedure. Another possible reason for the apparent failure of Tibetan nuns to work to create a bhikṣunī lineage may be Tibetan Buddhism’s emphasis on meditative practice and periodic solitary contemplation rather than developing a solid and disciplined communal monasticism. Perhaps the nuns were content with novicehood while cultivating strong meditative discipline.

Gender discrimination and the ensuing lack of opportunity for women has also led to a marked absence of female monastic leaders, authority figures and examples for nuns, as mentioned earlier. With few nuns qualified to be abbesses, nuns have continued to rely on male teachers and abbots. Domination by male figures, who frequently lack commitment to their students, in many cases spending as little time as possible in the nunnery, has ensured subservience of nuns, while a lack of educated female supervision has unquestionably influenced their monastic deportment and discipline.
There has been little emphasis on physical refinement in Tibetan monastic establishments generally, both in Tibet and exile, but at least in monasteries the constant presence of an abbot completes the hierarchy. Nunnery hierarchy barely exists where groups of novices live together in a community lacking the upper echelon of authority, and where each nun in turn assumes the ordinary nunnery offices. As a result, nunneries have also been unable to produce prominent members to take a place at large ceremonies and Dharma functions. If called upon, qualified monks may teach, address religious gatherings and conduct public rituals. It has never been an expectation of Tibetan society - unlike contemporary Taiwan - that nuns would perform such functions.

Lastly, a significant deficiency in the religious education of nuns until recently has been the lack of adequate Vinaya instruction. The head nun at Dharamsala's Ganden Chöling Nunnery commented on this lack: "Nuns have not fully understood their obligations, discovered what rights they had or learned how to behave." Their ignorance of Vinaya and some significant Buddhist texts has kept them in the dark. Some of these shortcomings are beginning to be addressed and the stamina and perseverance of many Tibetan nuns may perhaps help win them their rights and the chance to explore their potential.

3. Why Are Tibetan Nuns Disadvantaged and is this Inevitable?

Despite the not unfounded claim that women in Tibetan society traditionally enjoy a degree of freedom denied women in many other Asian countries, Tibetan nuns appear to be less independent than their lay sisters, as mentioned above. Clearly there is inconsistency in the value placed upon these two groups of women. Laywomen are not

26 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, Dharamsala, March, 1996.
in direct competition with men whereas, within the monastic structure, nuns are ranked hierarchically lower than monks. Tibetan society's attitudes to the two groups of nuns and monks is therefore based on their unequal monastic status. Hannah Havnevik sums up the situation:

Nuns are respected because they wear the robes of the Buddha, because they have taken vows renouncing lay life, and because they do meritorious religious work. However, they find themselves competing with monks within the same religious structure, where most of the rules have been made to accommodate the needs of monks, and where monks have occupied all positions of importance. Nuns and their religious institutions are largely ignored. Laywomen, on the other hand, enjoy much informal power in the household where they do not compete with men, but where they have the possibility of influencing their husbands.27

Tibetan society respects the Tibetan monkhood and extends to it every traditional support essential to its continuance. From the simple deferential bow in the street to a passing monk, to the handing out of generous donations to the monk assembly on important religious occasions, the Tibetan laity demonstrates its veneration of monks. Conversely, Tibetan popular culture possesses its share of unsavoury and crude jokes and stories about nuns. When a nun walks in the street, she is often ignored or greeted in a casual manner. At religious gatherings, nuns are frequently overlooked altogether in the distribution of money, food offerings and blessed substances, and are rarely afforded a reserved area in which to sit. Tibetan nuns are also viewed with some scorn by the general monk population, who at times snigger behind their hands at the nuns' traditionally self-depreciating responses to certain situations. Some monks feel that nuns are only playing at being monastics. In view of this attitude, monks who are chosen to be the abbots of nunneries are not always viewed with the same respect by their peers as those selected to head any of the large monasteries, and often they assume their duties

27 Hannah Havnevik includes a comparative section on Tibetan laywomen and nuns in *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns* (p. 183).
with reluctance.

Generally speaking, Tibetan nuns acknowledge that they do not play as important a role in the monastic hierarchy as monks. They are usually self-effacing and have not as a rule pursued higher philosophical teachings but instead have concentrated on ritual and ceremony.28 Restricted by society's perceptions of them and conditioned by cultural constraints, they have traditionally maintained a low profile and remained satisfied with basic religious practices and exclusion from the larger monastic sphere. The perpetuation of these entrenched views has led to passive acceptance of their lowly position and a reticence to break free. What started out as traditional societal discrimination gradually became a universally accepted truth in which it was assumed by society and by the nuns themselves that they possessed less ability and less credentials and should thus be extended fewer possibilities. This indifferent attitude so permeates Tibetan society (and some other Buddhist societies) that current moves by the Tibetan Women's Association to upgrade the position of the nuns is seen by them as historic and revolutionary, when in fact it is normal and long overdue. In Taiwan, the nuns' place in monastic life is secure and acknowledged; gender-reform is no longer a priority.

As with most Buddhist and, indeed, other societies, Tibetan Buddhists appear to regard maleness as the norm, and despite the soaring textual imagery of the female in various Buddhist scriptures and the egalitarian nature of Buddhist philosophy in general, the reality remains different. Furthermore, many of the sūtras which do present positive images of women and which are held in high esteem by other Buddhist traditions such as

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28 Hanna Havnevik also discusses nuns' levels of knowledge and scriptural expertise. Almost all her informants, who consisted of both nuns and monks, stated that the nuns themselves were partly responsible for their own lack of philosophical knowledge (ibid., pp. 170-173).
the Chinese, are not given centrality in Tibetan Buddhism. The idea of asserting the spiritual role and potential of the female is not new; it merely requires a re-examination of primary texts and rediscovering and reaffirming woman's equal place in the religious sphere.

Buddhism originated as a monastically oriented tradition, and monasticism in Buddhism is centred around renunciation and self-discipline. The path of renunciation and the traditional role of the Buddhist Sangha vis-à-vis the laity, has to an extent precluded certain areas of social reform and welfare, and up until the present time, Tibetan Buddhism in particular has not been a religion which focuses on social reform, concerning itself with the spiritual rather than the mundane. The traditional lack of interest in raising the status of nuns, creating adequate facilities for their development, presenting them with equal opportunities for religious education and for roles in the religious hierarchy, and making available to them certain areas of secular education and worldly knowledge, is perhaps one direct consequence of this limited outlook. The tardiness with which the elder monk hierarchy is dealing with the issue of introducing the bhikṣuṇī lineage, for example, has also been described as stemming from a general lack of social concern.

The emphasis has rapidly changed in Taiwan and elsewhere, where nuns and monks are active in certain aspects of social reform, instilling Buddhist ethics in society, administering hospitals and working with orphans, the mentally ill, prisoners and the homeless. Buddhism's spread to the West is certainly characterised by social action and Western Buddhists are running hospices, working with the homeless and visiting prisons.
and hospitals.

It is also from the West that the move to raise the position of Tibetan nuns is emerging; modern feminist thinkers perceive the current situation as being unacceptable and outdated. In part this could be viewed as a kind of evangelical zeal on the part of Western feminist women. However, as Tibetan society enters the modern world, Tibetan nuns are beginning to see for themselves the need for and the inevitability of change. They are expressing their own desire to catch up. Western women are also acting out of concern for their Tibetan sisters who have not had the benefit of the organic evolution of feminist thought on which to draw.

Tibetan nuns have also been traditionally hampered by what appears to have been a shortage of senior female role models. The Tibetan Buddhist literature does not document the existence of great numbers of eminent women practitioners, and close examination by concerned scholars repeatedly uncovers the same small number of illustrious names.

With a very few notable exceptions, nuns have not had the advantage of being able to learn from and aspire towards an elder nun who commanded the recognition of society or the respect of the religious community. This virtual absence of female figures in positions of authority and as holders of the requisite spiritual knowledge has had an incalculably limiting effect on female religious communities. By the very nature of the monastic environment which demands the separate location of monks and nuns and a distance between them in pan-monastic community affairs, it is highly unsuitable for monks to be in charge of nuns, and awkward for them to be the mentors and confidants

\[\text{30 The state-recognised incarnation of Dor-je Phag-mo (rDo-rje Phag-mo) (see footnote 17) is one well-known example. The nun, Shugsep Jetsunma Rinpoche, the Abbess of Shugsep Nunnery to the southwest of Lhasa, was also widely accepted and sought after for religious teachings and advice from monastics and laypeople alike (see Section III.2.3 concerning Shugsep Nunnery in exile).}\]
of nuns.

Clearly, the personal and warm relationship which can exist between the mother-superior and the nuns in Christian convents allows for harmony and growth and for the easier resolution of delicate situations than would be possible with a monk in charge. The difference in the atmosphere of a nunnery headed by an abbess, and in the attitudes of its nuns, from a nunnery controlled and overseen by a monk can be clearly seen when comparing Hsiang-kuang Temple in Taiwan or Samten Tse in Mussoorie, both headed by an abbess, with Ganden Chöling or Dolma Ling in Dharamsala which, although at times not accommodating a resident abbot, are both governed by one.

It is obvious that old habits and attitudes are largely responsible for the nuns' immobility. However, Havnevik states that many of her informants maintain that it is the nuns' responsibility to change their situation:

> there are no rules or regulations stopping the nuns from acquiring more knowledge or from doing more and better religious practice...[T]he nuns themselves are responsible for the state of affairs and it is entirely up to the nuns themselves to change their situation.\(^{31}\)

On the other hand, many Tibetans believe that the nuns are not encouraged, and as a result display a submissive demeanour and a lack of self-confidence. It is certainly evident from my field-work that in many quarters the nuns are not noticed, not encouraged and not taken seriously.

There are also several local factors contributing to the inferior position of Tibetan nuns in exile at the present time. The Tibetan community in India and elsewhere in the subcontinent is limited by the very central fact of exile and the scattering of resources.

\(^{31}\) ibid., p. 162.
They are dependent upon the Indian government for permission to buy land and to build, and lacking economic independence, their living standards often remain low as a result, although some Tibetans have acquired more wealth than most Indians. The nuns' communities are a double victim of this situation, standing as they do well down the list of recipients of aid. The majority of Western sponsors prefer to support monks and monasteries. Though monasteries far outnumber nunneries, and consequently many more existing monasteries than nunneries require help, well-decorated and furnished new monasteries continue to rise. It is, by contrast, a constant struggle for nunneries to raise money to put up simple utilitarian buildings and to acquire furnishings and basic creature comforts.

Clearly, the key to bringing balance into this gender-biased situation is the introduction of broad-based, multi-faceted education for nuns which, aside from thorough training in traditional Buddhist philosophy and meditation, should include management studies, computer skills, feminist thought, English language and self-expression. It is not inevitable that the nuns be disadvantaged. They themselves must learn to stand up. The institution of bhikṣuṇī ordination, not as the exception but as a normal expectation, and as the completion of the ordination process, would ensure the equivalence of monks and nuns to the extent that it is advocated and permitted in the Vinaya and practised in contemporary Taiwan and Korea.

A group of Benedictine monastics visiting Dharamsala in 1996 for interreligious dialogue and a sharing of views, believes that the Tibetan nuns can learn from the Christian model. One sister, Sister Mary Margaret, stated:

[The nuns] are going to have to do outreach because of the nature of their needs, and become economically self sustaining. They really have to think through
reappropriating monasticism in exile, the uncritical transfer of practices and styles from Tibet. There is nothing wrong with the teachings, you know, the substance is fine, but there is a need to reappropriate them for women, more assertive women, more educated women, and then to work at outreach and not lose their prayer. They have to work on this whole idea of money and prayers. The economic balance... and being more developed as women. I think it's going to be a tough thing. I fear there is no leadership yet, and as that emerges there are going to be some questions. 32

Khandro Rinpoche, abbess of Samten Tse Nunnery in Mussoorie, agrees that education and economics hold the key to independence and equality for Tibetan nuns, and that an understanding and acceptance of the concept of full ordination will finally present nuns with the tool they need to implement that equality. Another of the Benedictine monastics, Sister Pascaline, confirmed this idea:

The difference of ordination vows for monks and nuns is a real problem in the Buddhist system. Until that can be equal, it will influence the way the lay people view the nuns. 33

Clearly, the attitudes of the monks must change too, but a society which in many respects remains enclosed within its old traditions and patterns despite its sudden and enforced entry into the twentieth century, and which has to a certain extent missed out on the natural evolution from medievality to modernity, cannot proceed faster than it can proceed. The prevalent view of women is only one of Tibetan society's problems, but it is, at least, one area where change can be encouraged to come from the inside, from the women and nuns themselves.

33 ibid. p. 122.
II THE NUNS' LIFE AND THE NUNNERIES

1. Background

There are many communities of Tibetan nuns living in the Tibetan settlements of south India and the Himalayan regions from Bhutan to Ladakh, in established nunneries similar to the ones included in this study and in loose-knit contemplative communities, such as Nagi Gompa in the hills directly north of Kathmandu, the hermitage of Panggaon Ritro near Manali, and the community of nuns in Rewalsar, near Mandi, both in Himachal Pradesh, as well as in remote areas of Zanskar, Lahul-Spiti, and the eastern Himalaya.

Although many nunneries are exclusively nuns' communities, a small proportion of monastic communities in exile, particularly in isolated regions, consist of both male and female, and frequently both ordained and unordained, practitioners. A large number of nunneries also continue to be affiliated to monasteries as they were in Tibet. Thrangu Tashi Jong Nunnery (Khra-'gu bKra-shis lJon) in Kathmandu is connected to Thrangu Monastery with Thrangu Rinpoche serving as abbot, while Namdroling Nyingma Nunnery in Bylakuppe near Mysore, south India has affiliations with Palyul Namdroling Monastery (dPal-yul gNam-grol gLing), of which Penor Rinpoche (Pad-nor Rin-po-che) is the abbot. Jangchub Chöling Nunnery (Byang-chub Chos-gLing) in Mundgod, Karnataka State is led by the abbot of Ganden Monastery (dGa'-ldan) with two Ganden geshes instructing the nuns. It is rare that a nunnery will be presided over by a nun in the capacity of a qualified abbess, although this situation sometimes occurred in Tibet.

35 See Elisabeth A. Stutchbury, "Rediscovering the Western Himalaya" (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1991), for descriptions of the isolated Lahul Valley and some of the mixed monastic communities of that region, in particular Khadang Gompa.
At the time of writing, it appears that Khandro Rinpoche, abbess of Samten Tse (bSam-gtan rTse), may be the only abbess in exile, although many nunneries have a head nun. Dharamsala’s Ganden Choling Nunnery (dGa'-ldan Chos-gLing) did appoint an elder nun as abbess in the past, but she was inexperienced in nunnery administration and unqualified in Buddhism and the appointment was generally felt to be unsatisfactory. As the above examples illustrate, the abbot or a senior monk of the mother monastery or of a nearby monastery is often the head of the associated nunnery, with other monks attending the nunnery to teach. Alternatively, monks from a monastery of the same school may be appointed as abbot and teachers for a set term.

At present, it is most common for Tibetan women to make a personal choice for ordination. Very few female children are placed in nunneries by their families; most of my informants decided, often against the will of their families, to forgo marriage and join a nunnery. This usually happened in their late teens or early twenties. A small number leave the householder’s life after divorce, widowhood or other life-changing situation. Section III.3 includes a representative selection of Tibetan nuns’ own comments concerning their varied reasons and motivations for choosing a religious life as well as about their goals, aspirations, feelings about the nun’s life and where full ordination fits in that life.

Each nuns’ community generally has its own established routine and system of daily religious practice and ritual in accordance with the particular Tibetan school (lugs) to which it belongs. As a rule, the nuns rotate the positions of responsibility within the community. They share community chores and join together for communal ceremonies, rituals and prayers for the lay community.
Although there is not the same level of reciprocal interaction between monastics and the lay community as there is in Taiwan, monks and nuns are called upon to perform prayers for the dead and the sick, to remove obstacles, bless new homes and to ensure success in ventures. It is more common for monks to conduct funeral and obstacle-removing rites and also to go to the homes of lay people for any ritual that is requested. However, when nuns have the reputation for efficacy in certain rituals, particularly Tārā (sGrol-ma) prayers, they are frequently called upon to perform prayers in their own nunneries for which the nunnery is paid.

They also maintain their own personal religious commitments. When time permits, when they have saved enough money or when the community can spare them, individual nuns may enter strict meditational retreat (bsnyen-mtshams) under the guidance of their teacher, undertake pilgrimage (gnas-khor) to sacred Buddhist sites in India and the surrounding areas, or travel to receive further religious instruction from lamas. It is the custom for large assemblies of disciples to gather periodically to hear eminent lamas of all the Tibetan Buddhist schools present teachings (gsung-chos) central to Buddhist practice, and series of initiations (dbang) which empower the practitioner to undertake tantric practices legitimately. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also follows this tradition and frequently offers major teaching events throughout India, which are always well attended by large groups of nuns.

Hanna Havnevik states that "there is little evidence that nunneries ever resembled or functioned as Buddhist universities"36 in Tibet previously in the way that many monasteries did. Nunneries did not traditionally possess the resources or structure to

36 Hanna Havnevik, op. cit., p. 51.
organise religious curricula. Nuns who acquired scholastic religious knowledge, usually within the Gelukpa School which emphasises intellectual study and achievement, were the exception rather than the rule. Nuns in Kagyu and Nyingma nunneries traditionally have had more ties with yoga and meditation training in which many nuns excelled, at times surpassing the achievements of monks in some prominent monasteries.

In exile, regular religious teaching has been introduced only recently in some of the larger nunneries, with Kagyu and Nyingma nuns following the traditional monastic shedra (bshad-grva) or higher Buddhist studies curricula, and Geluk nuns undertaking the geshe degree program. There are few Sakya nuns in exile. Nuns living in small remote communities who desire religious instruction must still seek out a teacher on an individual basis and request teachings. Although it is not as common for Geluk nuns to enter long retreats, nuns within the Kagyu and Nyingma schools regularly undertake three-year retreats. Nuns from Karma Drubgyu Dargyey Ling (Karma sGrub-brgyud Dar-rgyas gLing) Kagyu Nunnery at Tilokpur, near Dharamsala, may enter a retreat at Sherab Ling (Shes-rab gLing), the mother monastery, at Bir, Himachal Pradesh, of which Situ Rinpoche (Si-tu Rin-po-che) is abbot. Thrangu Tashi Jong nuns journey across Nepal to Manang in the Annapurna Himalaya to do three-year retreats, and the Nyingma nuns of Shugsep Nunnery (Shug-gseb) in Dharamsala travel to Pharping, a renowned pilgrimage place south of Kathmandu.

37 See Section I, footnote 27 for explanation of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.
38 Situ Rinpoche is a strong supporter of the introduction of bhikṣuṇī ordination and out of a total of 65 nuns at Tilokpur nunnery, seven have already travelled to Hong Kong to receive their full ordination in the Chinese tradition. The head nun at Tilokpur, Pema Tsurtrim, received her full ordination in 1984 and believes that many Tilokpur nuns want to become bhikṣuṇis but need education and an explanation of its relevance and importance to guide them. In her own case, it was not until she had been to Hong Kong and experienced the ceremony of ordination and witnessed the Chinese bhikṣuṇī tradition in action that she fully appreciated the impact the ordination has on a nun and its importance in her religious life.
The economic situation of the nunneries, communities and hermitages\(^{39}\) in exile is tenuous. A very small percentage of nuns originate from aristocratic backgrounds and can rely on personal financial and material support from their families. The overwhelming majority are extremely poor and derive their meagre income either from sporadic sponsorship, small donations from the lay community or from money that the nunnery earns performing rituals for the laity. In many cases, the necessity to generate income for the nunnery demands that a very large amount of time be devoted to such rituals, to the detriment of personal spiritual practice and development.

A few nunneries are taking the financial situation in hand by campaigning for sponsorship from Western Buddhists. In the major western Buddhist magazines, advertisements can be found describing the desperate conditions in some nunneries and requesting help. Some groups of nuns make calendars, prayer flags, incense and other religious items for sale in the West, while others are beginning to visit the West to raise money. Clearly, the situation in Taiwan is very different where a generally affluent and economically secure lay community has the means to contribute bountifully to the monastic community. Although Taiwanese monastics devote themselves to society, it is not financial exigence which motivates them to do so.

2. Vinaya and Monastic Obligations

A woman in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition wishing to enter monastic life must initially

\(^{39}\) A nunnery is a formally established institution following rules and a daily structured program. A community usually consists of a loose-knit collective of like-minded practitioners adhering to certain rules and a daily schedule, but based more on personal practice than group routine. A hermitage is generally made up of a small group of contemplative practitioners, usually living in semi- or strict retreat, who only occasionally meet together for group activities. The nuns in these groups may also be categorised into practitioners and meditators, ritualists, and the largely formally uneducated nun whose religious practice consists of personal prayer and mantra recitation, circumambulation and pilgrimage.
receive the five lay precepts of an upāsikā (dge-bsnyen ), which are taken in conjunction with taking refuge. The next step towards ordination is leaving the householder's life or rabjung (rab-tu-'byung-ba ), which is often undertaken immediately before novice ordination, and consists of accepting a senior bhikṣu as abbot, changing from lay clothes into monastic robes and taking up a new name. In addition, the head is shaved except for a small tuft which is cut by the abbot during the ritual.

Rabjung is followed at any time by ordination as a novice and the accepting of the ten precepts (dge-tshul-ma'i sdom-pa ) at a short ceremony.40 These three foundational steps correlate with those taken in the Chinese Buddhist tradition: wu chieh, ch'ü-chia and sha-mi-ni, with the exception of the postulancy stage (hsīng-che ) which is not found in Tibetan Buddhism. There is no rigorous monastic training between each stage as there is in the contemporary Taiwanese system, however, and few checks to ascertain the suitability and experience of the candidate. This omission has had some disastrous results, particularly for Western monastics living outside Tibetan religious communities, who often have no support system and little understanding of Vinaya at the time of their ordination.

The novice ordination ceremony itself, which lasts about two hours, comprises three sections: preparation, actual ceremony and conclusion. Five senior monks assume the positions of abbot (mkhan-po ), master of formal acts (las kyi slob-dpon ), novice master (dge-tshul gyi slob-dpon ) and two witnesses (las kyi kha-skong ). During the

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40 Although Tibetan novices take ten precepts, they are expanded into 36 rules. For example, the root precepts of killing, lying and sexual conduct are expanded to more than ten, while such prohibitions as singing, dancing and playing music, and wearing perfumes, ornaments and cosmetics, which amount to two precepts, each occupy one separate precept (that is, six altogether). Not sitting on a high bed is expanded to four precepts.
preparation, over forty questions concerning the suitability of the candidate are put and answered, refuge, lay precepts and rabjung are taken, perhaps for the second time, and the abbot gives advice and explains the correct reason for ordination, which is the resolution to be freed from the cycle of suffering. The actual precepts are received while repeating lines after the abbot and contemplating that the precepts have arisen in the mind. The ordinee must possess a set of robes, the yellow patched upper robe (chos-gos), a begging bowl (lhung-bzed) and sitting cloth (gding-ba). In conclusion, the exact time of ordination is announced, prayers of promise, thanksgiving and blessing are recited and the new novice prostrates to her abbot, who is to be regarded like a parent.

Within the Vinaya set down by Śākyamuni Buddha there are three obligatory monastic commitments, without the observance of which a Buddhist monastery is considered incomplete. These three, twice-monthly recitation of the Pratimokṣa Sūtra or sojong (gso-byong), keeping the annual rains retreat (dbyar-gnas) and removal of the rains retreat restrictions (dgag-dbye), are the bases of monastic life and are the mainstay of Buddhist monks and nuns throughout the Buddhist world. Novices in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are generally conscientious in observing these three rituals, but because their implementation requires administration by monks, geographic logistics sometimes conspire to make it impractical to observe all three regularly. In addition, as long as the involvement of monks is required, they also serve to perpetuate the nuns' subordinate

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41 These questions are the traditional inquiries into religious beliefs, encumbrances, livelihood, state of health, age and whether the five heinous crimes have been committed. If males are receiving ordination, they are additionally asked if they have previously violated the four root bhikṣu precepts in a former ordination. Females are not asked this question because they can only receive bhikṣuni ordination once, while men can receive it three times.

42 Although Tibetan Buddhism, like Chinese Buddhism, belongs to the Mahāyāna school, the Pratimokṣa monastic system of individual liberation has its origins in Theravāda Buddhism. Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions augment their monastic practices with bodhisattva precept and practice, while Tibetan Buddhists further undertake tantric precepts and associated esoteric practices.
position within the monastic hierarchy.43

Were bhikṣuṇī ordination available to the Tibetan nuns, their twice-monthly recitation could be conducted in seclusion and free of bhikṣu authority as it is in Taiwan. The present situation, however, requires the novices to attend the monastery, except in the case of nunneries which are too distant (at Dolma Ling Nunnery (sGrol-ma gLing) in Dharamsala, the novice recitation is conducted before the abbot at the nunnery), and to enter the Buddha Hall at the prescribed juncture during the bhikṣu recitation.44

When the novices enter, they first make three prostrations to the presiding bhikṣu and then proceed in groups of three to squat before other bhikṣus who are obligated to hear their confession. Following this, they retreat to the rear of the hall and join with the bhikṣus in chanting praises to Śākyamuni Buddha, reciting the Heart Sūtra (shes-rab snying-po), performing an offering ritual (gtor-ma cha-bzhi byin-rlabs) and making further general confession of misdeeds (sphyi-bshags). Finally the novices again prostrate in threes before a bhikṣu and recite the Poṣadha for Novices (dge-tshul-gyi gso-sbyong). This recitation is their declaration of purity after which they again leave the Buddha Hall while the bhikṣus complete their own Pratimokṣa recitation.

One of the senior novices from Ganden Chöling Nunnery told me that many of the

43 One of my Tibetan nun informants outlined the situation in which nuns must rely on monks for an abbot, for receiving novice ordination, for their entire religious education, for many of the more complicated rituals, particularly Dharma protector rituals (chos-skyong), for fire pujas (sbyin-sreg), consecrations (rab-gnas), initiations (dbang), for the construction of ritual tormas (gtor-ma), for entering and leaving the Rains Retreat and for Pratimokṣa recitation. This state of affairs leaves them almost entirely dependent upon the monkhood, and certainly with only a meagre degree of autonomy. As mentioned elsewhere, Chinese nuns are also dependent upon monks for their ordination and for entering and leaving the Rains Retreat, but in all other ways they are independent.

44 Vinaya stipulates that Formal Acts (Skt. karma; T. las) of the Samgha must be performed out of the hearing of those not fully ordained.
bhikṣus at the Dharamsala temple (gtsug-lag-khang) were ignorant of the novices' prayers and could not even effectively hear their confession. Often the novice nuns would have to beg the bhikṣus to attend to them with whispered pleas of 'kutche, kutche' (please, please) to the great amusement of other monks and the embarrassment of the novices. Because His Holiness the Dalai Lama has given the nuns permission to attend Prātimokṣa recitation at his temple with the monks who live in Dharamsala, the novice nuns do not wish to lose this privilege by refusing to attend, although they frequently dread the occasion. This is one demeaning situation which would be completely avoided if even four novices became bhikṣunīs and were themselves able to hear the novices' confession in the nunnery.

Śākyamuni Buddha instituted the Rains Retreat as a time of contemplation, additional study, remaining within the vicinity of the monastery and assisting the lay community in case natural disasters should occur due to excessive rain. Because of the numbers of small creatures which can be injured on the ground during the monsoon, the Retreat also helps to preserve the precepts of monastics at that time. The Retreat begins on the sixteenth day of the sixth lunar month and extends for three months.

The initial ceremony takes place during the sojong on the fifteenth with the appointment of necessary officials and the distribution of counting sticks to ascertain the number of retreatants. Novices are summoned towards the end of this rite to be included in the counting. The rules of the retreat are announced, namely to refrain from emitting waste into running water, to gather all necessities together, to strive in accumulating virtue, to

45 Four bhikṣunīs represents a quorum, which can then function as a Bhikṣunī Saṅgha for the sojong observance.
46 The short Rains Retreat begins on the sixteenth day of the seventh month and lasts two months, concluding on the same date as the long Retreat.
maintain a clean environment, and to refrain from crossing cultivated fields. An
agreement is then made to join together the following day to make the promise to reside in
the Rains Retreat. 47 Individual nunneries decide what activities to emphasise during this
time. Some nuns enter retreat, while others intensify their studies or choose a particular

Three months later, the Rite of Removal is performed at the *sojong* ceremony, with
bhiksus (or bhikṣùnīs in those traditions that have them) reciting their verses first before
the novices are called in. The main purpose of this concluding rite of *pravāraṇā* is for
the faults of individuals committed during the retreat to be discussed from the three
perspectives of what has been seen, heard and suspected. Secondly, by means of grass
stalks distributed to all participants and which are also used during the discussion of
faults to symbolise harmony, the number of those accepting the Removal is announced. It
is traditional for those concluding the Rains Retreat to go some distance beyond the
boundary established for the Retreat to break attachment to the residence of the past three
months. 48

Elementary Vinaya and the monastic precepts are taught to Tibetan nuns in their nunneries
by monks, while senior nuns instruct more junior nuns in basic deportment and monastic
behaviour. There are certain clothing standards expected of the nuns: it is compulsory
for them to wear their upper vest or döṅkar (*stod-khag*) and shawl or *zen* (*gzan*) in
public places, with no hats or sleeves permitted, although these regulations are relaxed in
their rooms. Sports shoes, long-johns and other items of lay clothing are not acceptable.
The head must be shaved before hair reaches two finger-widths in length. Further

48 ibid., pp. 76-78.
The new Buddha Hall of Ganden Chöling nunner set amidst pine and deodar trees in the hills above Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India.

Ganden Chöling's head nun, Venerable Tenzin Tzenlha (left) and one of my nun informants during a discussion in Ganden Chöling's reception office.

Ganden Chöling's nuns meet for morning prayers in the Buddha Hall. Their tea and breakfast bread is in front of them.
A Tibetan history class in Ganden Chöling’s Buddha Hall, which doubles as a classroom.

Ganden Chöling nuns make tsa-tsa images from clay. After the tsa-tsas have dried, they are often painted.

After morning prayers, Ganden Chöling nuns, still wearing their yellow ceremonial robes, queue for lunch.
discussion of Vinaya is included below in the context of individual nunneries.

3. The Nunneries

**GANDEN CHÖLING NUNNERY** (*dGa'-ldan Chos-gling*)

Ganden Chöling Nunnery was established in 1973 in an old house in the hills above Dharamsala with 21 nuns. They then borrowed money to buy land more conveniently situated close to the main temple in Dharamsala, which is the focal point of religious activity and at which all important ceremonial functions in the Tibetan Buddhist calendar take place. In 1975, after raising further funds from many countries, they moved into the first completed building, a wooden structure containing prayer halls and rooms for the nuns, whose number had increased to 108. Since that time, concrete accommodation blocks, whitewashed in yellow and white, have sprung up across the hill, connected by small paths and gardens.

In 1994, with the recent addition of a new prayer hall (*lha-khang*), classroom, library, office, kitchen, clinic and nuns' quarters, there were 125 nuns at Ganden Chöling, some of whom had recently escaped from Tibet. The prayer hall is painted in traditional yellow with large double red doors and red pillars. The spacious interior is graced with statues and religious paintings. Above the prayer hall is a roof courtyard surrounded by rooms, washrooms and a large reception/meeting room. At certain times of the day a flurry of yellow can be seen as the nuns emerge from the prayer hall and gather to queue for tea or meals at the kitchen which is nearby. There is no dining room, the nuns instead taking the food, which usually consists of rice, lentils and vegetables or steamed dumplings and soup, to their rooms in large tin plates and mugs. They also bring thermoses to be filled

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49 Venerable Lobsang Dechen, "Tibetan Nuns and Nunneries", *DOLMA*, 1994, p. 41
with enough Tibetan butter tea to last through the day.

The nuns' ages range from fourteen to eighty, but the majority are aged between twenty and forty. Thirty nuns are too old or ill to attend regular classes, suffering from such diseases as tuberculosis, anaemia and digestive disorders. This situation has an effect on the entire nunnery, as many of these nuns cannot perform their duties, fulfil their potential or receive a formal education, although they devote a great deal of time to meditation.

If a nun wishes to join the nunnery, she must request permission from the abbot. If he agrees and there is space, she may immediately become a member. Although there is no probationary period, if a nun does not appear serious or consistently breaks the nunnery rules, she may be expelled even if a long time has elapsed. This is also the case if a nun transgresses her precepts, however I was told that in this situation nuns often leave voluntarily rather than suffer the humiliation of expulsion. Nuns who decide to leave the nunnery for other reasons must also inform the abbot. In some cases they leave for a limited period of time in order to undertake a retreat or a pilgrimage, but during this time they are not supported by the nunnery.

Hierarchy within the nunnery is unelaborate. The abbot, who is appointed from one of the major Gelukpa monasteries for a period of three years, is in charge of discipline, decision-making and education. The abbots of some nunneries do not live at the nunneries they head, but at Ganden Chöling the abbot's residence is centrally located.

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50 Nuns generally sleep two to a room, and this arrangement is changed every two years. Senior nuns can choose their room-mate. New nuns are sent wherever there is an empty space.

51 If appointed, the abbots must take turns to head the nunnery whether they wish to or not, but they very often do not know about administration or nuns' issues. In many cases, the monk sees the appointment as a burden and carries out his obligations unwillingly. Sometimes, however, the choice is popular and there is great mutual respect between the abbot and the nuns.
within the nunnery precincts. Although abbots of monasteries in Taiwan also live within
the monastery, in monasteries which also house nuns, the abbot's quarters are generally
far from the nuns' living area.

Below the abbot is the chant-master (dbu-mdzad). She leads the recitations and must be
conversant with all relevant rituals as well as with playing the ritual instruments. She
holds this position for one to two years and sits first beneath the abbot in the prayer hall.

The next position is occupied by the disciplinarian (dge-bskos) who sits to the side in the
prayer hall and enforces order in the hall. She is also in charge of general nunnery
discipline and adherence to the rules and metes out warnings and penalties when
necessary. On occasion, she assigns extra duties or grounding as a penalty, however it is
her duty to try and smooth the situation and facilitate its resolution. If serious offences
occur, the abbot is also consulted, but such light offences as not attending prayers or
going outside the nunnery without permission simply result in warnings.

Beneath the disciplinarian, the nuns sit in ordination order in the prayer hall, although
there are other offices which are assigned for varying lengths of time. The secretary
(drung-yig) manages the office work, finances, correspondence, arranges prayers for the
lay community, liaises with Tibetan government departments and receives guests. At the
present time, she is also coordinating further construction work at Ganden Chöling. She
is helped with accounting by two treasurers (dngul-gnyer), whose position is rotated
every two years.

There are three kitchen-workers/stewards (gnyer-pa) who shop for the nunnery food,
organise the kitchen and serve the nuns. They hold this position for three years, but a
Tibetan man comes in to help with heavy work such as carrying the enormous gas
cylinders from the kitchen when they need refilling, and handling heavy cauldrons of rice. Two prayer-hall stewards (sku-gnyer) care for the prayer hall for one year, while one shrine-keeper (mchod-gyog), whose position is rotated monthly, prepares offering tormas, sets up the shrine for the daily rituals, rings the gong to signal the beginning of prayer sessions, performs the ritual during the session and fills and empties the offering bowls.

All able-bodied nuns take turns for one week to do some kitchen duties to help the kitchen-workers, clean the toilets, sweep and clean the nunnery and tend the new gardens. Those with full ordination or who are over sixty years of age do not take part in these chores. Junior nuns take turns to care for old or infirm nuns, washing them, cleaning their rooms and collecting their food from the kitchen. Making breakfast bread, which is served in the prayer hall with tea during a short break in chanting, is rotated on a three-day cycle among nunnery residents, two at a time. The rotation system for all nunnery tasks is worked according to the class roll numbers. Each class has a class monitor (rgan-bdag), whose appointment lasts for one year. She is in charge of the class timetable, ringing the class bell and keeping the roll. Every Sunday all the nuns clean the nunnery grounds and buildings. The remainder of the day is a holiday and nuns may leave the nunnery, have recreation, cook in their rooms and invite guests.

There are many large expenses incurred in running the nunnery, including food, medical bills for sick nuns, educational materials, and electricity. Further capital costs, such as construction and purchase of fittings must also be met. Ganden Chöling derives the bulk of its funding from rituals performed for the lay community and from donations raised in the West. In addition, ninety nuns have found personal sponsors. Their monthly
sponsorship is divided by the nunnery into pocket money (Rs. 100) and money for food (Rs. 75) which goes to the kitchen. Nuns and monks also receive occasional offerings from the laity at religious functions.

If a nun is not sponsored, she receives an equivalent sum from the Tibetan Nuns' Project, which operates under the auspices of the Tibetan Women's Association. New nuns are initially given toothbrushes, soap and towels, but must subsequently purchase their own supplies from their pocket money. The purchase of robes also comes from their own money, although offerings of robes for the entire nunnery are sometimes made by lay people. Nuns must also pay for their own pilgrimages and travel. The nunnery organises and sponsors funeral rites, the 49-day rituals, cremation and tsa-tsa (tsha-tsha)-making52 for deceased nuns. During my visit to Ganden Chöling, a group of nuns made a batch of tsa-tsas, stamping out the clay reliefs from brass moulds, leaving them to harden and then dipping them in coloured paint. They sat in a cheerful group under a canvas awning, pounding the clay with a heavy wooden stick and singing mantras. On the day they painted the tsa-tsas and laid them in the sun to dry, they wore voluminous blue aprons and derived a child-like pleasure from getting spattered with bright green paint.

The daily routine followed at Ganden Chöling is as follows:

5.30 am Rise (in winter nuns rise at 6.00 am, but old nuns usually rise as early as 4.00 to meditate)

6.00 Regular nunnery prayers, rituals and chanting (including a five-minute break to eat a breakfast chapati)

8.30 Break (personal chores)

52 Miniature clay figures, often depicting the Buddha, the three long-life deities or other central deities and containing some ashes of the deceased incorporated in the clay mixture.
9.30  Prayers requested by the lay community

11.30  Lunch

1.00 pm  Classes (English, Tibetan, Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan history)

3.00  Tea break

3.30  Resumption of classes

5.00  Dinner

6.30  Long philosophical debate practice

9.00  Individual practice, memorisation, meditation

Lights out at unspecified time

This routine changes according to the religious calendar. On auspicious Buddhist days the nuns are often invited to the main Dharamsala temple to participate in prayer sessions or to attend teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. They also attend the twice-monthly Pratimoksha recitation which takes place before dawn on the fifteenth and thirtieth days of the lunar month. 53 On other important occasions throughout the year they may spend several days undertaking special recitations. One such ritual they regularly perform as a group is the fasting retreat or nyungnay (smyung-gnas) of Chenrezig (sPyan-ras-gzigs) for four or six days in two-day sessions.

For the first time in history, nuns at Ganden Chöling and other Gelukpa nunneries are following the same philosophical curriculum as most Gelukpa monks, 54 beginning with a preliminary course called 'the collected topics of valid cognition' or dudra (bsdus-grva)

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53 As recitation follows the waxing and waning of the moon, six recitations a year actually take place on the lunar fourteenth.

which contains a number of elementary texts, such as 'Awareness and Knowledge' or lorig (blo-rigs) and 'Signs and Reasonings' or tarig (rtags-rigs), studied to introduce new students to the debate system. This subject is a prerequisite to embarking upon the higher topics of Buddhist tenets and requires two years to complete.

Following dudra, the 'perfection of wisdom' or parchin (phar-phyin) is taken for up to seven years. The principal text used for parchin is The Ornament of Clear Realisation or Abhisamayālaṃkāra of Maitreya Buddha, and its commentaries. At the conclusion of this course, nuns should be familiar with the systems of thought of the principal philosophical schools of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism.

'Valid Cognition' or namdre (mam-'grel), which concerns the study of logic, reasoning, epistemology and non-Buddhist tenets, follows. So far no nuns have reached this point as it takes nine years to complete the previous two levels and, although instruction began at Gaden Chöling nine years ago, initially it was sporadic because the nuns depended upon monk teachers who were not always available when needed. Now there are two full-time monk teachers in addition to the abbot.

Dolma Ling, which is a model nunnery, has been established using new ideas and principles for nuns' education and training, and has set in place a complete curriculum of study, presently extending for twelve years. Gaden Chöling has not prepared such a thorough structure, however, and it remains to be seen how its plan progresses. But, there can be little doubt about the potential of the nuns. Once given the chance to study and debate, they are enjoying themselves and, according to officials in the Tibetan Women's Association, are surpassing expectations. Called upon to debate some of their basic texts before a large gathering of Dharamsala monks, headed by His Holiness the
Dalai Lama in late 1996, nuns from the main Gelukpa nunneries in India, Ganden Chöling, Dolma Ling, Jangchub Chöling and Jamyang Chöling (‘Jam-dbyangs Chos-gling’), displayed skill and acumen.55

The inclusion of nuns in the traditionally male institution of Jang Gun-chen (Byang dGun-chen) or winter debate session, is also of historic significance. The tradition began in Tibet where monks from the three main Gelukpa monasteries would gather in winter at Jang Monastery, in the vicinity of Lhasa, to live in retreat, study and debate intensively for up to two months. Although its organisation has changed in exile, the tradition continues, and that nuns have been permitted to participate indicates an important step forward.

In addition to Buddhist philosophy, the nuns take classes in English, Tibetan language and grammar and Tibetan history, but they receive no other secular instruction and remain backward concerning global issues and technology. When a western nun who was working at the nunnery to establish the new medical clinic brought a vacuum cleaner back from Delhi, a nun of quite senior standing shrank from it in terror, refusing to go near it despite persuading arguments about its harmlessness. This same nun adamantly refuses to learn to operate a computer, although several other nuns are using computers. It is clear that there is a great need for broad and modern education with creative visual aids to facilitate and develop awareness and comprehension of the outside world and to place the lives of the nuns in a wider perspective.

The abbot of Ganden Chöling instructs the nuns in basic Vinaya and precept. Senior nuns teach junior nuns monastic deportment and when a new nun enters the nunnery, she

55 Again in late 1997, a second debate session was attended by nuns from four major Gelukpa nunneries in India.
is supposed to find a senior nun who will instruct her and guide her in rules and discipline. It is then the senior nun's responsibility to ensure that the new nun behaves. The nuns also go to a senior nun if they need personal guidance. If they have a serious problem, they go to the abbot or to their own lama on the mountain, if they have one, who also answers their personal religious questions.

Each year the nuns sit written examinations in English, Tibetan and Tibetan history, while the abbot and visiting geshes attend the nunnery to examine the nuns' progress in philosophical debate. They are also given small tests periodically. Although some nuns occasionally complain about the pressure of study and the number of subjects, they are serious and dedicated. The majority of young nuns nurture plans to become geshes and the teachers of other nuns. For nuns who have recently left Tibet, where religious study was minimal and manual labour occupied most of their time, it is a big change in emphasis, but one which they are facing with courage and enthusiasm.

During the two-month winter hiatus, nuns may leave the nunnery and go on pilgrimage, visit their families or undertake retreats. This is a popular time for them to do retreats, because the abbot prefers them to study and take part in nunnery activities and routine during the rest of the year. Senior nuns teach younger nuns how to set up the shrine and perform the preliminaries for various retreat practices and, after the retreat's conclusion, they participate in the essential fire ritual, which is conducted by invited monks. Lamas are also requested to attend the nunnery and bestow initiations and teachings during the winter break.

The secretary of Ganden Chöling, Tenzin Tzenlha, a young and well-educated nun,

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56 As the degree of geshe is an academic qualification, which lay people too can achieve, there is no need for nuns to be bhikṣuṇīs as a prerequisite for embarking on a geshe degree.
expressed her wish, which echoed the feelings of the majority of nuns at Ganden Chöling, that the nuns could become learned and consequently be less dependent upon the monks. One innovative step the nuns have taken recently is to begin learning the ritual art of creating sand mandalas. While I was conducting my field-work at Ganden Chöling, the nuns were feverishly working to master the art within a period of three months in order to contribute to a cultural display, ‘Women on the Roof of the World’, in Bombay. Even as the daylight dimmed, the rasping sound of the ridged funnel (lcags-sbu) being scraped to make the sand flow penetrated the stillness of the nunnery as the nuns bent low over neat and highly stylised religious designs of coloured sand. When given the opportunity to learn and participate in areas of religious life hitherto closed to them, the nuns display dedication and enthusiasm and I was told that even the abbot was surprised at the speed with which the nuns acquired this skill.

Another essential skill which the nuns are gaining is basic competency in hygiene and health work. Several workshops in health training have been given by a Western doctor, instructing the nuns in hygiene, nutrition, sanitation, infectious diseases, medication and basic gynaecological problems. Both Ganden Chöling and Dolma Ling have clinics where several nuns are learning how to assist the visiting doctor as health workers for the other nuns.

The nunneries do not engage in activities with the lay community, because the nuns are still in the position of having to learn religious philosophy and to consolidate their own

57 On one level the mandala is a cosmic representation of the universe. On a deeper level the mandala symbolises the pure, deified residence of a tantric deity into which the disciples are initiated, and as such it occupies a central role in tantric ritual. Mandalas can be presented in three ways: a two-dimensional symbol on paper, a mandala created from coloured sand, and a three-dimensional mandala complete with all its symbolic components.

58 Since this time, a group of nuns has also travelled to Europe to create sand mandalas for world peace.
basic education. They are not yet qualified to share skills or organise religious activities for the lay Tibetans, and it has not been traditional for them to do so. However, the laity do find Ganden Chöling a peaceful haven and while I was there many women visited to discuss their problems and find support. It is not uncommon to see nuns walking in the street or circumambulating the temple with lay women. One aged and well-known meditator-nun, the late Ani Gomchen, often spent time sitting in the small shop of a Tibetan woman friend and supporter. Ani Gomchen would pray for the woman and she, admiring Ani Gomchen's meditation practice and achievement, gave her food and money.

**DOLMA LING (sGrolma gLing)**

In 1990, a large group of nuns arrived in Sarnath, Bihar State, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama was teaching. Over forty of them had left their homes in eastern Tibet two years previously on a pilgrimage to Lhasa, but when they arrived in Lhasa they were threatened by Communist police and had to slip away in the night without even seeing the sacred sites they had walked so far to visit. They continued their perilous journey towards western Tibet, along the way being joined by many more nuns, and finally managed to cross on foot the high Himalayan passes into Nepal and make their way south to India. Theirs is the largest single group of nuns to flee Tibet.

On their arrival in India, there were no facilities for what numbered well over 100 nuns and they were split into several groups, some electing to go to accommodation in a Tibetan settlement in Uttar Pradesh State and others living scattered in rented rooms, while the largest group chose to travel to Dharamsala despite the lack of housing. Initially this group, numbering nearly seventy nuns, was crowded into two small rented houses.
The Himalayan mountain range is the setting for the Tibetan nunneries in this study.

The newly-completed office and reception buildings at Dolma Ling nunnery in the Kangra Valley, below Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.

Two Dolma Ling nuns who participated in this study stand outside the new accommodation block.
Dolma Ling nuns meet in groups to debate Buddhist philosophy in the fields behind the nunnery.

Three nuns taking their turn on kitchen duty at Dolma Ling.

Nuns from Dolma Ling and other Tibetan nunneries participate in a peaceful demonstration on the occasion of the March 10 Lhasa Uprising anniversary, 1997.
with their immediate needs being met by the Tibetan Nuns' Project,\textsuperscript{59} and it was here in 1992 that I first made contact with them. Sleeping in every corner of the houses, even on the steps, and cooking in an outdoor shelter, they were still joyful to be in a free Tibetan community with the chance to openly express their spirituality. Their situation, however, was far from ideal and so with money previously raised to purchase four acres of land in the Kangra Valley below Dharamsala to build a nuns' educational institute, it was decided also to construct a nunnery on the site.

Construction of the nunnery began in May 1993 with a two-storey housing block comprising 24 rooms into which the nuns moved as soon as it was finished in October 1994. By early 1997, two housing blocks, accommodation for staff and guests, an office, classrooms, dining room and kitchen, and medical clinic had been completed, while the prayer-hall was still being built. By 2000, it will have the capacity to house 275 nuns in six housing blocks.\textsuperscript{60}

Dolma Ling has come into being organically out of a pressing need, and is in a unique position at the present time because there are plans to construct a Higher Studies University on the site where nuns who wish to will be able to undertake advanced courses in dialectics, philosophy and ritual, and thereby be in a position to achieve high

\textsuperscript{59} The Tibetan Nuns' Project was the brainchild of Kalon Rinchen Khadro, Education Minister in the Tibetan government-in-exile. Although the Project was initiated in 1987 by the Tibetan Women's Association and the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan government-in-exile to channel assistance to Tibetan nuns in exile, it came actively into being in 1990/91 to answer the needs of the large influx of nuns into India from Tibet. As its primary concern is education for nuns, in 1990 the Project had purchased four acres of land below Dharamsala to build a nuns' institution for advanced religious studies. Due to the urgent need to house the nuns, the land was used to construct Dolma Ling nunnery, with construction of the institution to follow later. Since 1990, the Tibetan Nuns' Project has grown into an organisation which raises funds for sponsorship for the nuns of several nunneries, for teachers' salaries, and for the placement of exile nuns in nunneries. By 1997, it had arranged sponsorship for over 400 nuns in five nunneries.

\textsuperscript{60} "Tibetan Nuns' Project", Fall 1998, p. 6.
levels of religious education and to instruct new young nuns. Now that it has been established, it is the aim of the Tibetan Nuns' Project to develop Dolma Ling as a model nunnery and one which can serve as a guideline and prototype for nunneries in the future. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also expressed his support of this plan during a visit to the nunnery in November 1995:

Briefly speaking, there might have been some nunneries in ancient Tibet where educational programs were available. But in recent times a standard teaching-learning program is not available in any of the nunneries. Therefore, if we are able to have here a well-planned standard nunnery while in exile, then we can have it as a model in the future in Tibet. At that time we can say, 'Ah, in India we had an excellent educational system at Dolma Ling. Now we can go accordingly.' In this way it will serve as a model. 61

Thirteen of the nuns at Dolma Ling are long-term residents of Himalayan border regions, while 102 have come directly from Tibet. In addition, there are seventeen day scholars who return to their own accommodation at night. The nuns at Dolma Ling are aged between fourteen and 45. A nun wishing to join Dolma Ling must apply to the Tibetan Nuns' Project, her acceptance being primarily dependent upon space, 62 but nuns who already live in a nunnery are discouraged from applying because Dolma Ling has quickly gained a good reputation and many nuns would be happy to change affiliation to the detriment of their own nunneries.

The emphasis has been primarily on housing new arrivals in Dolma Ling, but as the nuns become educated and the aims of the nunnery begin to be served, an entrance test may be imposed to first select nuns with greater intelligence, drive and potential. Although some

61 "Talk of H.H. the Dalai Lama during his visit to Dolma Ling on November 9, 1995", Tibetan Nuns' Project, Dharamsala, November, 1995.
62 Initially four nuns shared each room, but with the completion of the second housing block, they are now two to a room. Rooms are simply furnished with two-tier bunks, table and chairs, shrine and bookshelves. There are washrooms at each end of the buildings.
nuns have received elementary education in Chinese schools in Tibet, many of the new arrivals could not even read and write when they arrived in India and the first objective of the nunnery has been instruction in basic educational skills. With these skills now acquired, the majority of the nuns are showing themselves to be dedicated to religious study and debate.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama also said in his address to Dolma Ling nuns that because Dolma Ling is a new nunnery it can be shaped from its very inception to follow a certain direction and run on a positive track without the old habits which are entrenched in some other monastic establishments. It is envisaged that the nuns will be trained in all aspects of monasticism, incorporating instruction in deportment, Vinaya, ritual, religious philosophy and a selection of secular courses.

Because Dolma Ling will be an educational institution offering places to nuns of all Tibetan Buddhist schools, it has been set up from the beginning as a non-sectarian establishment. Although nuns may themselves follow any particular school and may privately fulfil that school's religious commitments, group prayer and practice sessions are carefully formulated to remain free of sectarian language or reference to any one school or lineage.

Dolma Ling is headed by an abbot, who is a senior monk from Drepung (Bras-spungs) Monastery in south India. Beneath him are the traditional monastic positions as at Ganden Chöling nunnery. The non-religious positions of secretary, treasurer and construction manager are assumed by lay people in order to allow the nuns more time to study. The nunnery is divided in the traditional monastic way into four houses or khamtsen (kham-tshan), Sherab (Shes-rab), Tsundue (brTson-'grus), Jinpa (sByin-pa)
and Zopa (bZod-pa), meaning, respectively, wisdom, perseverance, generosity and patience (four of the Six Perfections of the bodhisattva). Each house contains about thirty nuns including the day students. Inter-house debate, public speaking and essay contests are organised on a regular basis to develop communication skills and offer a break in the intense daily routine.

The nunnery performs a few prayer rituals for the lay community, which produces some income. Most of the nuns are now sponsored from the West. In addition, the nuns have been contemplating introducing income-generating projects such as hand-made paper and greeting cards with religious motifs, tailoring, incense-making, fabric-printed scarves and candles.

Dolma Ling has a full-time daily schedule which leaves little time for any extra-curricular activities:

5.30 am Rising bell
6.00 Morning prayer session
7.00 Breakfast
8.00 Class I
9.00 Class II
10.00 Tea break
10.15 Class III
11.15-12.15 pm Class IV
12.30 Lunch
1.00 Class V
2.00 Class VI
3.00 Afternoon tea break
Religious instruction at Dolma Ling follows the same curricular structure and required
texts as at Ganden Chöling, but much more time is devoted to study and memorisation.
The duration of the study program will be thirteen years, at the end of which a graduate
will be awarded the *Uma Rabjampa* (*dBu-ma Rab-’byams-pa*) degree, Diploma of
Middle Way Philosophy, which is also awarded to monks in some monasteries.

The daily routine allows for six hour-long classes in all six of the subjects up to *Parchin*
with at least one and a half hours allocated for formal debate, while Ganden Chöling only
has three and a half hours of classes and spends at least two hours performing rituals for
the lay community. Dolma Ling nuns perform fewer prayers for the community while
devoting the bulk of their time to acquiring the knowledge which will benefit others in the
future. While ritual, sand mandala construction, butter sculpture, *torma* -making and
religious dance (*chams*) are included in the timetable at Dolma Ling, Ganden Chöling
nuns have yet to study these aspects of religious practice in depth.

I observed several debate sessions during my first visits to Dolma Ling nunnery in the
early 1990s. In the absence of classrooms or a traditional debate courtyard, small groups
of ten to fifteen nuns gathered in the rice fields and exuberantly grappled with knotty
philosophical questions before a majestic backdrop of soaring Himalayan foothills. There was an atmosphere of humour, camaraderie and determination to learn. Many nuns told me that it is their wish to return to Tibet and teach other nuns who have not had the opportunity to study, and this goal of helping their sisters in Tibet impels them forward in their studies.

In addition to Buddhist philosophy classes, which are conducted by two visiting geshes, the nuns also attend classes in Tibetan and English language and literature, English conversation, mathematics, Tibetan history and social and general sciences. Seven full-time teachers (five lay Tibetans and two monks) and on occasion, visiting Westerners teach these courses, while an Indian nun from Simla teaches Hindi in addition to following her own studies. Dolma Ling has also created a number of clubs which meet at the weekend. Each nun must join one club and can choose from painting, cooking, sewing and embroidery, Tibetan poetry, reading, Tibetan calligraphy, Chinese or Hindi language, English lettering and ritual sculpture. As this is their only recreation within the nunnery, the nuns enjoy club activities as a break from intensive formal study. They are also involved in regular health-worker courses so they can contribute to the operation of their own clinic, and are learning tailoring, particularly robe-making, in order to save money on tailoring fees. This skill is also one which many Taiwanese nuns learn.

The nuns at Dolma Ling abide by strict nunnery rules which ensure a disciplined way of life and a beneficial apportioning of time. The rules are:

1. Attendance at prayers, morning assembly, debate sessions, class and all functions is compulsory.

2. Attendance at meals is compulsory and no one is allowed to take the food to the dormitories except for those who are sick.
3. Frequent absence from class and general bad behaviour may lead to denial of pocket money or expulsion from the nunnery.

4. Nuns may not be absent from class, prayers, debate sessions and all functions and gatherings without first submitting the proper leave application to the concerned authority. Exception will only be given to sudden illness or other unforeseen reasons.

5. Nuns may go for outings once a month during second Saturdays, but those wishing to stay overnight must produce a signed application from the concerned guardian/relative/friend who would take full responsibility for that particular nun.

6. Nuns are strictly not allowed to watch movies during their outings.

7. Guests of nuns are not allowed to stay overnight at the nunnery.

8. Prior approval of the Principal is required for any outsiders to meet a nun at Dolma Ling no matter what his/her relationship to the nun.

9. Nuns who are sick must obtain a medical slip from the concerned doctor/nurse/health worker and produce it to the Principal before getting the proper sick-leave slip sanctioned.

10. Nuns are always required to keep a decent dress code according to the set tradition and the Vinaya, except during manual work.

11. For any major breach of discipline/rules, a written warning will be given at first. If a nun repeats the same, she shall face expulsion from the nunnery.63

Discipline is well maintained, and the nuns also observe Vinaya obligations carefully, attending *sojong* with their own abbot in the nunnery and undertaking *yarne* and *gagye* during the rainy season. Because it is difficult for them to travel the thirty kilometres up the mountain to Dharamsala, they remain at Dolma Ling for these ceremonies, but when His Holiness the Dalai Lama or other important lama is teaching locally, they take the nunnery truck to the main temple, and it is a cheering sight to see it wending its way up the steep road through the deodar forests, its high tray-back packed tightly with jovial nuns.

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63 Copied from the Dolma Ling Rules displayed in both Tibetan and English on the nunnery bulletin board.
The establishment of Dolma Ling, with its emphasis on education and religious training, has been of profound significance within the Tibetan nuns' community, and will in time enable fully educated nuns to emerge empowered to be the creators of their own lives and to be channels of knowledge to other nuns as teachers and abbesses.

The following nunnery provides clear evidence of the additional benefits of having an abbess in charge.

**SAMTEN TSE NUNS' RETREAT (bSam-gtan rTse)**

The grinding and creaking Indian bus wound its way up the perilous and precipitous road from Dehra Dun towards Mussoorie, an Indian hill-station clinging to the top of a high ridge with views stretching into the misty blue infinity of the Indian plains on one side and away to the first snow-capped ranges of the Himalaya on the other. Samten Tse Nuns' Retreat is not easy to find, for it is not in Mussoorie itself, but several kilometres down the mountain on a little-used side road. This inaccessibility suits the ideals and purposes of the nuns of Samten Tse, for their lives and practice revolve around quiet but rigorous study, ritual and meditation, preparing them for the time when they will be qualified and well-trained nuns able to instruct other nuns in Buddhist meditation and practice.

I was looking forward to arriving at Samten Tse, meeting Khandro Chenmo Tsering Paldron Rinpoche (mKha-'gro Chen-mo Tshe-ring dPal-sgron) (Khandro Rinpoche), the
Khandro Rinpoche, Abbess of Samten Tse Nuns' Retreat, near Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh.

Khandro Rinpoche watches her nuns practise making ritual offering cakes (torma) out of clay.
Khandro Rinpoche (rear centre) officiating at morning prayers, Samten Tse.

A Samten Tse nun blows the conch shell to call the community to prayers.
young abbess, who is ordained as a novice nun in the Tibetan tradition. This nunnery, although in the early stages of establishment in 1995, is also prototypic in several ways. It offers a perception into the lives and situation of a small group of nuns chosen from Karma Chökhor Dechen (Kar-ma Chos-'khor bDe-chen), the mother nunnery in Sikkim, by Khandro Rinpoche for their aptitude, learning abilities and vocation.

The nine nuns and one young girl training to be a nun who were resident at Samten Tse when I visited in 1995 were led, taught and nurtured by Khandro Rinpoche. Her nuns, aged between twelve and 26 years in 1995, lived together in an old bungalow which used to belong to a member of the Nepalese royal family. Because they were few in number, the atmosphere resembled that of a large family. At the same time the daily routine and discipline clearly identified it as a nunnery. I stayed a few days and spent many hours talking with Khandro Rinpoche. I was fascinated by her views, her vision and her outspokenness and determined that I would return when the nunnery was further developed.

In 1996, when I returned to Samten Tse, there were fifteen nuns, including two twelve year-old orphan nuns from the Kunu region of north-western India. Khandro Rinpoche told me that she would like to keep the number of nuns at less than twenty so she can

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64 See Cho-Yang, Vol. 5, 1992, pp. 61-64, for an interview with Khandro Chenmo Rinpoche, a female incarnate lama or tulku (sprul-sku). She is the elder daughter of Mindroling Trichen Rinpoche (sMin-grol-gling Khri-chen), Abbot of the large and influential Nyingma monastery, Mindroling, in central Tibet, which has been re-established in exile near Dehra Dun. In the interview, she explains her lineage, upbringing and training in this lifetime and her responsibilities and aspirations. She also clarifies the situation surrounding female tulku and explains that, although there were clearly fewer female incarnates than male, there were quite a substantial number who were not generally known about because they spent the major part of their lives in retreat. According to Hanna Havnevik, Dorje Phagmo (rDo-rje Phag-mo), the Abbess of Samding (bSam-l ding) Monastery, appears to be the only female incarnation to be recognised by the Tibetan Government, however there are other female incarnations which are only recognised within their own tradition, by a certain monastery or even only by certain lamas (Tibetan Buddhist Nuns, p. 81).
direct her personal attention to all of them, ensure their stable progress and be sure that
there is a good level of communication between them. Her aim is to create a true sense of
family and of harmonious community within her nuns:

When you are living in a community, like a nunnery, you don't have your family
there. You are all supposed to be people who have taken up this Path, and therefore
the closest person that you can be to is one another living in that Samgha; all nuns
must be the first family.

Your attitude to your immediate family would be that you can forgive them for
whatever little mistakes they have made. You are allowed to quarrel if you cannot
agree with one another, but you don't keep that in your mind for your whole life. You
can excuse one another. You are open about your own feelings and you can actually
spend time listening to that other person instead of being alone. So, these attitudes
need to be established very firmly within ourselves - the attitude of Samgha getting on
with one another. That is the first immediate thing; philosophy, debate and all the
different subjects can be introduced later, but Samgha being like a big family, getting
on with one another is something that we need to work on.65

A large and innovative three-storey community building had also been completed by
1996. White, with red tiles and outdoor decks, it now houses the nuns in motel-style twin
bedrooms and also comprises a modern kitchen and office, large formal sitting room,
recreation room, bathrooms and an apartment for Khandro Rinpoche and her sister,
Jetsun Kushola (rJe-btsun sKu-zhabs-lags), also an incarnate lama, who teaches at the
nunnery. The original house still serves as a dining room, additional kitchen, shrine hall,
classrooms and guest rooms, while a small booth at the gate houses a security gateman.

Khandro Rinpoche says:

For women to have a very secure place is so essential. To not have to concentrate on
actually being attacked in the nunnery, verbally, physically, that is very important.

Khandro Rinpoche's position is unique at the present time in that she has received a full
religious education and completed her secular education up to the higher secondary level

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65 Interview with Khandro Rinpoche at Samten Tse, April 1996. All interviews with Khandro Rinpoche
were conducted in English.
in an Indian convent school. In addition, she has the obligation-free backing and support of some very prominent lamas in the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions, including her father, Mindroling Trichen Rinpoche. Partly because of her educational background, her aristocratic family connections and her illustrious religious lineage and partly because she possesses drive, initiative and imagination, she has had the opportunity to create and develop a nuns' community which can draw on her broad experience and can initially rely on the lamas of her lineage to give certain teachings, oral transmissions and initiations necessary to produce nuns who can begin a movement of female teachers.

She has a clear vision for Samten Tse, which includes many traditional elements of monastic education and training, but which also introduces some new concepts aimed at deepening knowledge, widening experience and gaining physical and mental acuity and self-confidence. She also wants the nuns to enjoy their religious practice and thereby create a mutual support group within which they may be happy in their spiritual lives. Criticism of her radical views has come from some monks, as Khandro Rinpoche had expected, but because the establishment is both financially and spiritually independent and not affiliated to a particular teacher, group or sponsor she has the freedom to choose the nunnery's direction and purpose.

During a conversation, Khandro Rinpoche told me that she believes that superficially, the situation in today's nunneries appears good, especially when compared with the early years in exile (1959-1980), but when examined on a deeper level, she said, "I don't think that it is anything we can be happy about." She stated that education and the confidence and joy in being a nun are the principal elements which are lacking:

If we compare it with the education [in the monasteries] even if one nun does study one text, a lot of people think she is very well educated and that she is very well
versed in debate. If a nun is able to go through a very simple debate, people think that is far more than enough for her. If you compare the status of a nun khenmo (abbess) with even a very ordinary khenpo (abbot) ... there is a huge difference. Because the nuns have not been educated, there are very few nuns who can go and teach other nuns. If you have men in the nunnery to teach, invariably there is a danger to your vows. Or even if the teacher teaches, except in a very rare case, the teachings are given very half-heartedly. ...Then from the side of the nuns, they are completely lacking in confidence. I do not think most of them even understand why they are there.66

She went on to say that nuns' lives and destinies cannot proceed while men are in control of them. Because she believes that the progress of the nuns is dependent upon their own efforts, the nuns studying under her care are progressive, open and modern. In her opinion, when viewed optimistically, there is some education for nuns generally, skills are being acquired and nuns are qualified to practise in retreat, however, when their status is compared with that of the monks, very little has been done. It is her wish to change this pattern and to instil in her nuns a sense of their own responsibility for their lives. She believes that the long-term lack of educational and monastic opportunity for Tibetan nuns is due in part to the nuns' own attitudes and self-perceptions, but she also feels that it is possible for nuns to gain a thorough religious education, learning at times from other monastic traditions:

It comes back to the nuns, women, themselves. They have an "It's not going to work out" kind of attitude, a feeling that women are of a lower birth which justifies their position. It is a kind of attitude of giving up hope. Some women have really tried to study hard and get an education, sitting outside doors and protesting. I have done that myself. It doesn't seem to work that well. I think we have to figure out what kind of education we are talking about. Having teachings and really practising them - these two things are very important. I would view education as such. I would say that we can gain a very good amount of knowledge from the Tibetan tradition, and if we find something good in the Chinese tradition, we can do that too. A lot of nuns in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea are very socially active. That is a good thing. So, we can learn a lot from these Chinese Mahayana activities, and even from Christian monasticism.

66 Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, April 1996.
Although she acknowledges that her own upbringing has been fortunate, she explains that she has not found discriminatory views among her own teachers:

I think I have been very fortunate and possibly a lot of things that I have experienced growing up are possibly not the same for everybody. But most of my teachers, in the sense of my root gurus, have been very supportive of women samgha. I have never seen my father show any kind of differences. Sometimes you find people who have a lot of sympathy for women, but still somewhere in a part of their mind you will still sense some kind of discrimination. I have never found that. Then there was His Holiness the Karmapa, somebody who has always been so supportive of women's issues and women's participation and role in Tibetan Buddhism. And the third one of my main teachers was Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, another person whom I have never seen say anything related to something like that women can't or aren't allowed to do something.67

Khandro Rinpoche believes, however, that women's minds do work differently from men's and in her nunnery she is aware of this when her nuns express their doubts and their fears or come to her to discuss their problems:

Over the long years of my experience with monks in my father's monastery, I have seen that most of them seem quite happy, they don't think so much throughout their life, "Was it a good life, was I in a good position or a bad position?"...And now that I have been spending more time with nuns I can see that women's minds work a little differently. More emotions, more susceptible to emotions, more sensitive. It doesn't mean that men are not sensitive, but definitely women are more receptive towards different changes that happen emotionally within themselves and in their surroundings. I try to work with the nuns in terms of their minds, whether they are happy with who they are, with being a nun.68

Although Khandro Rinpoche's own education followed the traditional monastic pattern, it was also more liberal than that of most heads of Tibetan monastic institutions. She believes she can bring a breadth of experience and progressive ideas to Samten Tse based on her own balanced religious and modern secular education, incorporating some traditional elements of Tibetan monasticism, but doing away with others.

67 Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, April 1996.
68 Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, April 1996.
Samten Tse's hierarchy consists of the traditional monastic positions, which are rotated among the adult nuns so that they can each become proficient in all aspects of nunnery function and management. The disciplinarian (*dge-skos*) maintains order in the prayer-room and checks the nuns’ observance of nunnery rules. The chant-leader (*dbu-mdzad*) must be conversant with all the prayers and rituals performed at the nunnery and is responsible for holding the chanting together and introducing new chants.

The shrine-keeper (*mchod-dpon*) is responsible for maintaining the prayer-room and the shrine which includes the preparation of ritual offering cakes for the daily rituals and the arrangement of ritual implements and substances used in the ceremonies. The last essential position is occupied by the kitchen steward (*gnyer-pa*). She undertakes the daily preparation of meals and ensures that there is adequate food in the kitchen. General nunnery duties are shared among the nuns, who manage the office, sweep, clean and maintain the buildings and small enclosed grounds and who also enjoy taking the old local bus up the steep mountain road to Mussoorie for nunnery shopping.

Khandro Rinpoche places emphasis on neatness, order and routine and in this respect Samten Tse is comparable with the atmosphere of a Taiwanese nunnery. Khandro Rinpoche often reminds her nuns that these factors are also part of Buddhist practice. She insists that they wear their robes well, sit well, perform ritual well and learn well the essential aspects of philosophy and ritual, for they all have their correct place in nunnery life and in the formation of a good nun. She has introduced an exercise session into the daily routine and the nuns go walking and take picnics into the surrounding hills, returning along the road in relaxed groups with Rinpoche in their midst as one of them. The scene is reminiscent of Wu-yin Fa-shih in Taiwan enjoying a moment with her nuns.
Khandro Rinpoche maintains a firm balance between discipline and recreation. Her demeanour is one of compassion tempered with sternness. While she has provided a television for the nuns to watch when they are relaxing, she also expects them to be present at the prayer-room as soon as the conch shell is blown, sending its haunting sound echoing around the hills. And while they may relax their dress for certain activities and lessons, every nun must conform to a strict code of dress during prayers. They must wear the dönkar and zen in the prescribed manner and if any nun appears even slightly dishevelled, Rinpoche stops her and gently adjusts her robes before she enters the prayer-room. Once inside the prayer-room, chanting and ritual, well learned and executed by the nuns from the playing of ritual music down to the smallest detail of the arrangement of the shrine, occupy the concentration of all.

On the domestic side, Rinpoche ensures that buckets of hot water are boiled for the nuns to bathe and wash their clothes, a touch which is lacking at most of the other nunneries I visited. As a woman she involves herself in the care and personal guidance of her nuns to an extent which I have not previously witnessed in Tibetan nunneries. While I was staying at Samten Tse in 1995, the nuns suffered from some skin irritation and Khandro Rinpoche herself supervised and participated in the application of medicated shampoo. She also frequently checks the kitchen and ensures that there is a variety of nutritious food available. Milk, eggs and fruit are a frequent addition, and the nuns also eat a variety

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69 Watching television and movies is forbidden in almost all monasteries and nunneries, although Dolma Ling has a television. Rinpoche says that forbidding such things only makes people want them more, to the extent of monks jumping out of monastery windows at night to go to movies. She says, "Well, let them see movies, discuss movies with them, let them see how movies are really made, what do actors really look like...then they won't be attached to it enough to jump out a window and go out. I think instead of forcing them to jump out of a window, if you install a television in their sitting room, it solves a whole lot of problems. So certain things I think are useful, but of course, as you have vows to keep then there are things that you cannot do."
of western dishes.

The daily meals prepared at the nunnery, which are eaten in the dining room from bowls placed on individual trays, are balanced and tasty and yet conform to the monastic ideal of restraint and simplicity. One day when a local Indian vegetable seller came by carrying a wicker basket of produce, she herself squatted down beside him and selected firm red tomatoes, large fresh cauliflowers and cabbages and paid him his due. When Rinpoche returns from visits to the Tibetan settlement below Dehra Dun where her father’s monastery is located, the car is always piled high with special foods, necessities and some treats which are not available in Mussoorie.

As a result of her care and her attention to detail and well-ordered lives, there is a high degree of interest and motivation and great potential for the nuns to consider preparing for ordination as a bhikṣuṇī. Khandro Rinpoche is personally very supportive of the Tibetan nuns’ movement for full ordination:

I don’t see it so much as for a big transformation that it might bring, but I do think it will bring some kind of fruition; I see bhikṣuṇī ordination as a fruition of all the hard work that you take up in studying. That is what I meant when I talked of education as being something which would result in something solid - a fruit. It may not be enlightenment in one lifetime, it may be taking up the bhikṣuṇī ordination. So I see it as a coming to fruition of effort on the monastic path....Another reason why I think bhikṣuṇī ordination should be encouraged is to form a hierarchy system for nuns themselves...70

She believes that within a few years her nuns can begin working towards full ordination:

[Bhikṣuṇī ordination cannot occur] unless you have a grounding, a foundation of teachings. When you study and when you practise, you get an understanding, and then you really know what renunciation is all about...At this moment, I don’t think anybody here is ready for ordination as a bhikṣuṇī. Because they still have some kind of an idea that if this doesn’t work they will go back, which they can do, but at the same time that means that a person really needs to have completely trained their mind

70 Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, May 1996.
to understand what the teachings of Buddha are. The day they really understand, it will be their decision. I will not need to tell them to take up bhikṣuṇī ordination. I won't have to explain to them what renunciation is. 364 vows are not going to be difficult for them to maintain. So I think that at the right time, then bhikṣuṇī ordination will be very useful and very good.\textsuperscript{71}

When members of the nunnery decide to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination, her intention is to build separate accommodation for bhikṣuṇīs to facilitate their adherence to the extra disciplines and responsibilities and to help them maintain their purpose while they remain such a minority within Tibetan Buddhism.

Khandro Rinpoche's modern views also extend to the economics of the nunnery. Although the nuns do some prayers for the lay community and earn a small income in this way, the emphasis is not on such activities. Instead, Rinpoche travels internationally for almost half of each year, teaching in Western centres and raising the money necessary for the operation of Samten Tse. She provides for her nuns herself, a situation comparable with some monastic establishments in Taiwan. Because the nunnery is small, this method of fund-raising, in addition to local donations, is adequate for its needs and also leaves the nuns free to study and practise. The schedule is arranged so that Rinpoche's absence does not cause an upheaval in the nuns' routine. The nuns enter retreat at that time, and also receive teachings from Jetsun Kushola and initiations from visiting lamas.

The daily schedule of Samten Tse is in line with traditional schedules adhered to throughout Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions. Following the nuns' early morning personal practice in their own rooms, a typical day is structured as follows:

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
6.00 am & morning bell \\
6.30 & morning prayer chanting \\
7.30 & breakfast and tea \\
\hline
\end{tabular} 

\textsuperscript{71} Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, May 1996.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>monastery chores and personal responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>Buddhist philosophy class, taught by Jetsun Kushola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>Buddhist canon (bKa'-gyur) class, taught by Rinpoche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.00 pm</td>
<td>lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>private time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>classes in Buddhist ritual, torma making, English and other secular subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>tea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>evening prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>general teaching by Rinpoche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>supper, followed by free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>personal meditation practice or study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>lights out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The year is divided into a spring and autumn semester. During the spring semester, Rinpoche is often travelling and the schedule is altered to include retreat sessions or longer hours of meditation, personal practice and study. The routine is not completely static and is varied to accommodate particular festivals, such as New Year (gLosar) and the anniversary days of important figures in the Karma Kagyu lineage to which the nunnery primarily belongs, although without the sectarian bias which is so often present.

There are also set days in each lunar month on which the nuns perform extra ritual and prayer. A general list of these rituals follows:

- 8th day of lunar month: Tsog offering ritual to Green Tārā (sGrol-ma llang-gu)
- 10th day: Tsog offering ritual to Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche)
- 15th day: Tsog offering ritual to Vajrasattva (rDo -rje Sems-dpa')
- 25th day: Tsog offering ritual to Vajrayogini (rDo -rje rNal- 'byor-ma)
- 29th day: Protector (mGon-po) ritual
Khandro Rinpoche believes that a nunnery should have a balance of religious philosophy, ritual and meditation and a solid foundation of Vinaya knowledge. She also stresses the need for adequate time to do personal meditation practices which are essential to the life of a nun. In her opinion, ritual training has been lacking in nuns' education generally so that, for any ritual more complicated than Tārā, lay people have traditionally turned to monks. If the nuns are followers of a certain lineage, they need to know the entire set of rituals for that lineage. In addition, it is her view that ritual practice leads to stable meditation and retreat, and philosophical training produces an open and incisive mind, which is also essential for meditation.

In line with this view, Khandro Rinpoche's nuns practise the entire ritual texts of Vajrayogini (rDo-rje rNal-byor-ma), Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), Vajrasattva (rDo-rje Sems-dpa'), Vajrakilaya (rDo-rje Phur-pa), Cakrāśāvara (bDe-mchog) and the protector Mahākāla (mGon-po) among others. She says, "We need to have perfect umzes [chant-leaders], if we are really to make the situation better."

The nuns at Samten Tse generally follow the Karma Kagyu lineage, but with a strong emphasis on Longchen Rabjampa's Nyingthik (sNying-thig) lineage. The religious curriculum conforms in most respects to the traditional ten-year shedra (bshad-grva) system existing in the main Kagyu monasteries. They begin their practice career with the Foundation Practices (mngon-'gro), and graduate to such general philosophical texts as Entering the Path of the Bodhisattva (Skt. Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra). Study of basic texts

72 The many Dzogchen Nyingthik (Innermost Essence) lineages were systematised by Longchen Rabjampa (kLong-Chen Rab-Byams-pa) (1308-1363), one of Tibet's greatest adepts, meditators and teachers.

73 A college for the theory and philosophy of textual Buddhism, usually affiliated to certain monasteries predominantly in the Kagyu and Nyingma Buddhist traditions.
is followed by Madhyamaka (Middle Way) philosophy, Mahāmudrā (Great Seal) and Dzogchen (Great Perfection).\textsuperscript{74} Vinaya is also studied from such texts as sDom-gsum (Three sets of Vows). In addition to studying philosophical texts, nuns should also be adept at explaining those texts to others, at transmitting the Buddhadharma.

The nuns also study modern secular subjects including mathematics, science, geography, world history and English. The senior nuns are already able to teach the young nuns part of these subjects and the television which Khandro Rinpoche has installed also contributes to development of a broad global view. They are striving to complete their religious and secular education rapidly so that they can begin to assume the much-needed role of women teachers.

For two or three months every year, most of the nuns enter strict retreat in their rooms, during which time they do not meet with one another. Most of the nuns have already completed their foundation practices and are performing kyerim (bskyed-rim) or development stage meditation on their own meditational deity (yi-dam) during the retreat. Two or three nuns who have completed the retreats previously, remain outside to cook and care for the retreatants so they have no need to leave the community house.

Khandro Rinpoche instils in her nuns the sense of Vinaya being a freedom rather than a restriction, as it is often incorrectly perceived. Vinaya allows a degree of relaxation which is not possible without monastic precepts, and it allows for the possibility of a level of practice which is difficult to achieve while distracted by lay life and its expectations. She believes that monastic precepts lend a strong support of awareness in every moment of daily life. She draws attention to a growing tendency among Tibetan Buddhist

\textsuperscript{74} The highest class of teachings according to the Kagyu and Nyingma schools, respectively, and the pinnacle of Tibetan Buddhist doctrine.
practitioners, particularly Westerners, to view lay life as being at least as efficacious as monastic life:

Today, it is very popular to talk about lay practitioners ... so much so that people are forgetting Śākyamuni Buddha. It is a very sad situation that Buddhism has come to. When we talk about enlightenment, what we actually mean by that is something that we need to understand. We cannot simply do a certain practice because we like it. I'm sure that if you are able to enjoy samsara [cyclic existence] and also do 100 per cent pure practice, it is very good, but I think that is very optimistic. So, coming back to the phrase of 'having your cake and eating it too', this is what is happening with most practitioners today. They simply do not want to give up whatever desires they may have, whatever attachments they may have, whatever personality, because they do not want to change. Because they do not want to give it up, they find somebody in Buddhist history who has been able to enjoy all these things and still be enlightened, and they take that person as a role model, but in the whole history of Tibetan Buddhism we have only had one Padmasambhava and one Yeshe Tsogyal. We have only had one Marpa and Dagmema, one Milarepa, and in these modern days we expect after simply taking refuge to be that person. So, people need to understand that in Buddhism the basis is largely renunciation and without that it is very difficult. 75

Rinpoche warns that, although many people criticise the monastic way of life, which appears to be a very protected and stark life, they should first experience a monastic lifestyle themselves and learn that even with monastic precepts, spiritual practice is still difficult to achieve, so how much more difficult it is to practise while desires, attachments and hatred are left uncontrolled. She maintains that enlightenment is almost impossible to attain without precepts and that Vinaya is a necessity and should be respected. Vinaya is inseparable from all aspects of the Buddha's teachings, from taking refuge up to the highest Ati Yoga or Dzogchen teachings; if discipline is separated, if awareness is separated, from the essence of the teachings, practice is impossible.

Although the nuns are unable to attend sojong regularly because the nearest monastery is over fifty kilometres away, a strong sense of discipline and the all-pervading presence of

75 Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, May 1996.
Vinaya in actions, words and thoughts is emphasised at Samten Tse.

Critical to an understanding of the purpose of Vinaya is a knowledge of the meaning of Buddhist practice and of the nun's life. Khandro Rinpoche teaches her nuns that the reason they are nuns should be because they understand the ten virtuous actions, the benefits of practising the Six Perfections (T. *phar-phyin*; Skt. *paramita*) and following the words of the Buddha. She explains to them the importance of their monastic community in which they share many things in common: the same teachers, teachings and practices, the same precepts to keep and the same Sākyamuni lineage which connects them. By understanding the monastic purpose, she enjoins her nuns to be happy in their lives as nuns, to work with their emotions in a realistic way, to accept that they will make mistakes, to purify those mistakes and to develop confidence in themselves.

Although all of the nunneries in this chapter are undergoing new building, expansion and innovation, which is in itself a positive sign for the development of the nunhood, the impetus for increasing opportunities for Tibetan nuns and raising their position within the monastic tradition has largely come from outside the nunneries, from Western women. Samten Tse, though a small nunnery, shows a clear indication of an inward and radical construction and movement towards female self-determination and self-confidence in Tibetan Buddhism. It demonstrates by its successful operation that a group of women monastics being led and educated by a qualified and enlightened abbess with a strong view of where to lead her community is one key to independence, self-confidence and the forward and upward mobility of the nuns. Financial independence is evidently also a factor in its success. Samten Tse shows the first real evidence that Tibetan nuns can realise their potential to become a strong and vital force, independent from but on a par
with the monk community and functioning free of their interference and domination.

However, Khandro Rinpoche expresses a warning:

...perhaps a mistake has been made in trying to make the nuns' Samgha very similar to the monks' Samgha. I feel sometimes that we could be something, I would not say better, but some kind of an identity of our own. We have the same vinayas; we have extra vinayas and therefore we can probably be more active. We learn from a lot of people who are doing similar things; we learn a lot from the monastic society, but we add something of our own, something that we find good.\(^7\)_\(^6\)

Clearly, the fresh approach which Khandro Rinpoche has introduced at Samten Tse will place her nuns in a good position for undertaking extra activities, as she says, and for bringing some new elements to the nun's life in Tibetan Buddhism. She is grooming her nuns not to be the same as monks or to seek their privileges, but, through education and their own efforts, to have equivalent responsibilities and opportunities, while adding something unique and useful of their own.

Although headed by an abbot, another recently-established nunnery, Thrangu Tashi Jong in Kathmandu, is also seeking a new approach and, while still a radical step for women in Tibetan Buddhism, the chance for its nuns to receive philosophical training and full ordination.

**THRANGU TASHI JONG (Khra-'gu bKra-shis lJongs )**

Thrangu Tashi Jong Nunnery, also called Tārā Abbey, is a new nunnery, and one of more than half a dozen in the Kathmandu Valley, situated in farmland several kilometres to the west of Kathmandu city and within sight of the great white dome, the benevolent, all-seeing Buddha eyes and the golden spire of the ancient Swayambhunath Temple. In 1994, the first phase, one two-storey wing consisting of rooms for the nuns, bathrooms

\(^7\)\(^6\) Personal interview with Khandro Rinpoche, Samten Tse, April 1996.
Tashi Jong

A group of Tashi Jong nuns in the shrine room of their temporary nunnery at Manangi Gompa, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Ani Tsomo, head nun of Tashi Jong nunnery.
Tashi Jong nuns perform afternoon puja.
and kitchen and dining facilities was begun, with the nuns doing most of the labouring work themselves to save costs. The second phase, which will include the prayer-hall, library and the second wing of nuns' rooms remains a plan until funds can be raised.

From 1990, and in the early stages of the building work, the nuns were living in temporary accommodation in a nearby monastery, Manangi Gompa, directly behind the Swayambhunath Temple. It was here that I first visited this community in late 1995. Manangi Gompa consists of a three-storey building in traditional Tibetan style containing simple but crowded accommodation for the nuns, cooking facilities and a small prayer-room filled with Tibetan religious paintings (thang-ka'), scriptural texts (dpe-cha') and a simple shrine. It is next door to a large Gelukpa nunnery, Kyedong Thukche Chöling, which accommodates over 100 nuns and which used to be located high in the mountains until it was washed away in a devastating flood.

In 1995, there were 58 nuns living at Manangi Gompa: twelve older nuns and 38 young nuns, whose ages ranged from twelve to 39; a further eight nuns were engaged in a traditional three-year retreat in Manang, a small village in remote western Nepal to the north of the Annapurna massif. During this time they have contact with no one except their lama and, if necessary, a doctor. Five nuns have already completed the three-year retreat, including the head nun, Ani Tsomo, who was 31 years old in 1995, and by the end of 1998 another four nuns will also have done so. Ani Tsomo, a quiet and self-assured nun with great warmth and personal presence, as well as leading the nuns in their daily monastic activities, was also in charge of the construction when I met her in 1995, and spent long days at the site supervising the building work. She has since travelled to Taiwan to raise funds for the completion of the second phase of the nunnery.
When I returned to the nunnery in 1996, the nuns had moved into the completed wing and the wood stove was already blackened from cooking many meals. As I arrived, a small room set up as a temporary temple, resonated with the sound of pūja, drums booming, cymbals clashing and long horns echoing around the nearby rice paddies, with the nuns' haunting voices raised in prayer, while a large photograph of the new Gyalwa Karmapa, born in Tibet in 1985, gazed benignly at his nuns from the ornate throne representing his presence.

In addition to kitchen and dining facilities, each simple room was occupied by two nuns, while a comfortable reception room provided guests with a place to relax and talk to the nuns. Although a wall had been built around the property, the grounds remained completely bare and it was clear that the nunnery was still in the early stages of development.

The nunnery was founded and is headed by Thrangu Rinpoche, a notable lama of the Karma Kagyu school, who is considered to be one of its foremost scholars and meditation masters. He is the Supreme Abbot of Karma Shri Nalanda Institute at Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, the seat of the Karma Kagyu school, and he is also the Abbot of Thrangu Tashi Chöling (Khra-'gu bKra-shis Chos-gling) Monastery in Kathmandu as well as being the founder of a traditional Tibetan monastic study centre at Namo Buddha in the hills beyond the Kathmandu valley.

Although many of his peers are not as supportive as he is, Thrangu Rinpoche advocates full ordination for Tibetan nuns and intends that his nuns will become bhikṣūṇīs and train in meditation and Buddhist philosophy. Girls from the age of five will be accepted into his nunnery with their parents' permission, but, concurrently with their religious
education, will continue to attend the local primary school until they have completed a basic general education. They can then choose whether to remain in the nunnery, receive their first precepts and follow the monastic path.

Thrangu Rinpoche’s plan is that Thrangu Nunnery will make available to nuns the full range of monastic, liturgical, philosophical and meditational training which is normally available to monks. Depending upon their interests and abilities, those nuns who qualified would enter into a five-year monastic college program, similar to his shedra program for monks operating at Namo Buddha, leading to the degree of Khenpo. Following this, the bhikṣuṇīs would engage in a three-year retreat and upon completion be sent to other nunneries and to Buddhist centres around the world to teach. He says:

Tibetan cultural biases have traditionally led to inferior education and training for Tibetan women. Therefore, the success of this project will depend upon the financial support of people from the West and the Far East where men and women have equal educational opportunities. I envisage that close links will be established between Thrangu Nunnery and foreign Dharma practitioners and centres; that my nuns will go abroad to teach and study Dharma; and that overseas visitors will come to the nunnery as well to offer their teachings and to study themselves.  

Although a full religious and textual education program will not be instituted until the nunnery construction is closer to completion, the daily routine, which was followed by Tārā Abbey nuns up to late 1996, included a large amount of instruction in practical religious skills such as sacred music, ritual and chant:

4.30 a.m.  White Tārā Puja (sGrol-ma skar-po) 
6.00  Tibetan grammar class 
7.30  Breakfast 
8.00  Continuation of White Tārā or other pūja 
10.00 - 11.00  Young nuns practise ritual instruments: Tibetan oboe (rgya-ling), long horn (rwa-dong), small and large cymbals (sil-nyen, rol-mo)

Thrangu Tashi Jong monastic hierarchy and activities follow the traditional pattern. All
the nuns at Thrangu Tashi Jong are currently novices and perform the *getsulma sojong*
together at Manangi Gompa with bhikṣus from Thrangu Monastery officiating. They
also observe the annual *yarne* Rains Retreat and *gagye* which concludes it.

As the buildings are completed and a full-time schedule of monastic study and practice
can be introduced, the development of Thrangu Tashi Jong over the next few years will
no doubt proceed rapidly, for the energy and modern ideas of its nuns will contribute to
its success in a country where nuns are also beginning to discover their potential and the
value of their chosen path.

**SHUGSEP (Shug-gseb)**

The new Shugsep Nunnery in Dharamsala, India, is the only nunnery in this study to
have an ancient counterpart in Tibet. The original Shugsep was formally founded as a
retreat centre in 1181 by an important lama of Densatil Monastery (*gDan-sa mthil*),
Gyergom Tslultrim Senge (*Gyer-bsgom Tshul-khrims Seng-ge*), although the well-
known yogini Machig Lapdrön had already recognised the site's powerful geomantic and
Shugsep

The entrance to Shugsep nunnery, Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh.

A group of Shugsep nuns in their room.
meditational properties and had often stayed there to meditate and teach towards the end of the eleventh and into the twelfth centuries.

The original nunnery takes its name from the juniper-covered slope on which it is situated.\textsuperscript{78} The yoginī and incarnation of Machig Lapdron, Ani Lochen, who was born in north-west India at Rewalsar in 1852 and spent her early years wandering in the mountains of India, Nepal and western Tibet, came to settle in central Tibet at Shugsep. It soon became known as her nunnery and she was referred to as Shugsep Jetsunma. The residents relied on her for their spiritual guidance. She became the principal heir of the lama who held the Longchen Rabjampa\textsuperscript{79} lineage and seat at Shugsep. Tibetans, young and old, and including the Reting (\textit{Rwa-sgreng}) Regent, the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa (\textit{rGyal-ba Kar-ma-pa}) and the father of the fourteenth Dalai Lama visited Shugsep for her blessings and advice. She lived to be 101 years old, passing away in 1953 to the accompaniment of many miraculous signs.

Up until the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976) when, along with thousands of other monasteries Shugsep Nunnery was destroyed, it continued to be an important retreat centre for adherents of the Nyingma tradition, where over 300 nuns lived, practised and followed the very specific practice lineages of the \textit{Dzogchen Nyingthik} (\textit{rDzog-chen sNying-thig}) and Machig Lapdron's \textit{Chö} (\textit{chod}) traditions.\textsuperscript{80} Today, over eighty nuns

\textsuperscript{78} The Tibetan word \textit{shug.pa} means the juniper or fragrant cypress found in Himalayan regions, while \textit{gseb}, dense, gives the added meaning of a thick forest.

\textsuperscript{79} Longchen Rabjampa spent time in meditation at Shugsep and it is because of his legacy that Shugsep nuns follow his lineage.

\textsuperscript{80} The \textit{Chö} teaching, which was brought from India by the great Mahasiddha Padampa Sangye (\textit{Pha Dam-pa Sangs-rgyas}), was transmitted in Tibet by Machig Lapdron, his principal disciple. A new statue of her stands in the rebuilt \textit{Iha-kang} at Shugsep in Tibet. The Tibetan word \textit{chö} means 'cutting through' and refers to cutting through the delusive emotions of the unenlightened mind by means of powerful and esoteric meditative practices.
continue to live and practise in the partially reconstructed nunnery.

The part played by nuns of this original Shugsep nunnery in peaceful demonstrations during the last decade against the repressive Communist régime has led to the flight into exile of many who have either been in prison, or who wished to seek an uninterrupted monastic life and a religious education in India. Shugsep nuns and other Nyingma nuns from eastern Tibet, principally followers of the great Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok (mKhan-po ’Jigs-med Phun-tshogs ), made up a proportion of those nuns who walked from eastern Tibet to India in 1990, and it is they who have since formed the basis of Shugsep’s revival and re-establishment in exile.

Because the nuns of Shugsep nunnery have specialised traditions which have been passed down from their lineage masters, they wish to continue to live together as a group so they can study and practise their own rituals and meditations. Over fifty Shugsep nuns, all less than thirty years of age, have settled in Dharamsala, moving in 1994 into the two houses which had originally been rented for the Dolma Ling nuns before their own nunnery was completed. Although these two houses are inadequate, the site of the nunnery is very peaceful and secluded, with spectacular views over the Kangra Valley below, and stands of ancient Himalayan cedars, oaks and rhododendrons surrounding the stone buildings.

The Tibetan Nuns’ Project, which also arranges individual sponsors for Shugsep nuns and funding for the nunnery’s daily expenses, has been gathering funds to increase the existing accommodation to house seventy nuns, build classrooms, teachers’ quarters, medical dispensary, kitchen and dining facilities and an assembly hall. In early 1997, when I last visited Shugsep nunnery, the nuns were sleeping two to each small room,
with the bare essentials of beds, table and a simple shrine shelf. Their kitchen was partially outdoors and a washroom block was some distance from the main buildings. One larger room had been converted into a prayer room into which the nuns crowded for their communal rituals.

Many of the nuns were new arrivals from Tibet and still bore some signs of their arduous journey across the mountains. They have, however, appeared to adapt with remarkable ease and have been applying themselves to their studies with great zeal, while also expressing the desire to return to Tibet as teachers for the nuns who have not been able to escape.

Another 24 Shugsep nuns who are inclined more towards meditation than study have settled in Nepal at a small new branch-nunnery which is currently being constructed. Already a first group of nine nuns has completed a three-year closed retreat at their Pharping retreat centre south of Kathmandu, gYu-lo bKod rJe-btsun gLing, or Turquoise-leaf Paradise of Tārā, while a further group of ten nuns began their retreat in early 1997. Their retreat schedule is very demanding and consists of four three-hour meditation sessions each day. During the retreat their practical needs are taken care of by two nun attendants who live in the centre with the nuns, while their spiritual endeavours are overseen by a resident retreat master.

The Pharping retreat nuns rise at 3 am and, apart from some textual study and review of their practice instructions, they engage in little else apart from their set practice sessions and specific rituals connected with the retreat. They also continue their chö practice each evening and maintain their own personal meditational commitments. During the entire three-year retreat, the nuns refrain from eating eggs and meat, which further increases the
starkness of the ascetic régime they have undertaken.\textsuperscript{81} After completing the first three-year retreat at Pharping in 1997, some of the nuns have returned to Dharamsala while some have chosen to remain at Pharping to teach the small group of Shugsep nuns who have settled at the new nunnery nearby.

Nuns who follow the Shugsep traditions are admitted into Shugsep nunnery through the Tibetan Nuns' Project and are also sponsored by it. When the bulk of the nuns first arrived in Dharamsala, they did not follow a structured course of study, but just performed their essential ritual commitments. With the establishment of the nunnery, a nine-year program of religious education has been instituted, following the traditional Nyingma higher institute courses. Penor Rinpoche, who is the present head of the Nyingma School, has undertaken responsibility for the education of Shugsep nuns in addition to his own Namdroling Nunnery which houses over 100 nuns. Qualified monks from his monastery, Palyul Namdroling, in south India, are sent each year to Dharamsala to teach and fill the position of abbot.

Shugsep nuns hold the same hierarchical offices as the nuns in the other nunneries in this study, including that of head nun, and follow a structured daily routine:

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|}
\hline
5 am & Rise \\
5 - 7.30 & Meditation and personal practice performed individually in their own rooms (on the 10th and 25th days of the lunar month they offer communal prayers) \\
7.30 & Breakfast \\
8.30-9.30 & Buddhist philosophy class \\
9.30-11.30 & Higher level Buddhist philosophy class \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{81} "Tibetan Nuns' Project", Fall 1997, pp. 3-4.
11.30 Lunch
2.00 pm English and Tibetan language classes
3.00 Tea break
3.30-4.30 Protector ritual to Mahākāla Protector
7.00 Set homework and memorisation of texts
8.00-9.00 Rituals requested by the lay community
9.00-10.30 Continued memorisation and personal prayers
10.30 Lights out

Sunday is a holiday at Shugsep nunnery as it is at the other nunneries, and the nuns often take the opportunity to go shopping, visit the main temple, perform circumambulations of the Dalai Lama’s residence and catch up with their own personal chores. Shugsep nuns have also participated in the health care training program for nuns of the Dharamsala region, with two nuns completing both the basic and follow-up courses.

The nunnery maintains a high level of discipline. Its location in the forest provides a natural barrier from many of the distractions found in Dharamsala village. Nuns are not permitted outside the nunnery boundary before 8 am or after 6 pm without a specific reason and, at that and all other times, they must be granted permission by the abbot and head nun. Relatives and friends can only visit nuns for a short time, and even parents who have come from Tibet are not permitted to stay overnight in the nunnery. The nuns must attend their classes unless they are ill or have the dispensation of the abbot.

As Shugsep progresses in exile, the first of its kind with direct links to Tibet, it will be interesting to watch how it fares in comparison with its sister nunnery which continues to expand, albeit under difficult circumstances, in its original sacred location.
The five nunneries examined are all very different. Their structure and hierarchy are typical of most Tibetan nunneries, and the difficulties they face are universal among the nunneries: they all face financial hardship and struggle to acquire basic necessities. Yet they each demonstrate unique features which make them relevant to this study, and significant in examining the lives of Tibetan nuns. Each of them is filling a great need among nuns for a safe place to live and study. They vary in size from fifteen to 115 nuns, whose ages range from twelve to over eighty. Although the nunneries are organised in a similar way, their education programs differ markedly, as do their rituals and prayers. All follow a full daily routine, although the content varies considerably from nunnery to nunnery. Those in charge of the nunneries have far-reaching plans for their nuns, but diverse approaches for achieving their goals. Many of the nuns themselves also have great ambitions for their future (see Section III.3), and the creation of these and other establishments in which they can freely pursue their chosen path will contribute to their success.

The nuns I spoke to in all five nunneries generally had a positive view of the potential of bhikṣuṇī ordination and of their own responsibility to other nuns less fortunate than themselves, particularly those nuns remaining in Tibet. Almost without exception, they expressed enthusiasm for education and the need for a strong religious and secular base on which to build experience and skills with which they will be able to teach Buddhism, assist other nuns and assume the task of being examples for nuns who have hitherto existed unnurtured and unempowered within a predominantly male hierarchical system.

When I showed the nuns photographs of bhikṣuṇīs in Taiwan who are in positions of
great responsibility, and who have achieved in their own right recognition and stature as the creators and founders of social welfare organisations, universities, hospitals, Buddhist institutes and nunneries, the Tibetan nuns crowded around passing the photographs from one to another in awe. They asked to keep them for inspiration, so they could aspire to the same levels of achievement within their own tradition. Given the chance, Tibetan nuns will certainly reach out for new and challenging quests.

Although Ganden Chöling has been established the longest, it is perhaps the least progressive of the five nunneries. Many of its nuns are now over sixty and are content with the way they have lived since they left Tibet in the 1960s and 1970s, but they encourage the younger nuns to broaden their own experience and horizons. The changes that have been introduced with the establishment of Dolma Ling in 1993, and which have filtered through to other nunneries such as Jangchub Chöling in south India and Ganden Chöling itself have, however, pleased the majority of young nuns at Ganden Chöling.

Dolma Ling nunnery has the advantage of having been set up as a model nunnery, whose structure and organisation other nunneries may seek to emulate if it succeeds. All eyes are focused on Dolma Ling as it enters its fifth year of operation since the first nuns moved into the new building in October 1994, and as its nuns continue to follow the rigorous and modern education system.

Like the majority of Tibetan nunneries, neither Samten Tse nor Thrangu Tashi Jong nunnery is affiliated with the Tibetan Nuns’ Project in Dharamsala which presently only has the means to support a small number of nunneries. Other nunneries must therefore find other sources of sponsorship. Samten Tse and Thrangu Tashi Jong are both Karma Kagyu nunneries and follow the traditional shedra education system. Samen Tse remains
unique in being led by a female *tulku*, and because of this, functions in a special way which is presently almost unknown elsewhere in Tibetan Buddhism. Thrangu Tashi Jong is less developed than all the other nunneries examined and has less resources on which to draw, but the plans for its progress are far-reaching. Within a few years the nuns will be responding to the fruits of their own hard work, and to the care and attention which is now beginning to be concentrated on Tibetan nuns in general.

Shugsep nunnery is distinctive in another way. Benefitting from administration and sponsorship by the Tibetan Nuns' Project, the nuns in exile have great hopes of re-establishing Shugsep's ancient traditions which are an essential element of its long and illustrious history in Tibet, and of following once again its practice and study lineages which have been curtailed since 1959. Shugsep nuns do not participate in all the activities which have recently been established for nuns in exile, such as debate and the public debate examinations. Instead, they concentrate on the rituals and meditation practices particular to their lineage, and the majority enter three-year retreat when they are ready. This strong meditational and practice aspect will also serve to contribute to and strengthen the overall development of nuns in the Tibetan tradition.
The enthusiasm and ideals of those Tibetan women who choose to enter a nunnery can be compared with those of their counterparts in Taiwan. It is easy to comprehend why they are drawn in large numbers to the nun's life. Tibetan nuns all have Buddhist family backgrounds, whether their parents are well-educated in Buddhism, or simply perform the meritorious deeds of the faithful. They have also been accustomed from an early age to seeing monks and nuns, visiting monasteries and having lamas come to their homes for rituals. This exposure to monasticism and the childhood impressions it leaves clearly contribute to the choice by some women to be a nun.

Those nuns born in remote regions of Tibet, as were most of the young nuns in this study, often have little secular education and have had to work hard in the fields and tending animals from childhood. There are few other life choices available to them if they decide against marriage. Often their decisions to become a nun are influenced by a wish to be free of the householder's life, characterised as it is in Tibet by hardship and long days of manual work, which mostly preclude education and committed religious practice.

In addition, they also want to be free to enter a nunnery unrestricted by quotas on admission, and study without Communist propaganda dictating to them. Although many nuns do enter nunneries in Tibet, often labouring alongside their sisters to reconstruct destroyed buildings, the pressures of Chinese rule drive many to flee into exile where nunneries have opened their doors to new arrivals. Some women even choose to postpone their ordination until they arrive in India, where they may have the good fortune to receive their precepts from the Dalai Lama himself. For those Tibetan women born in
India, there are also few fulfilling alternatives within the small Tibetan exile community, although career opportunities are increasing with improved educational possibilities. However, becoming a nun is still a popular choice for women in exile, particularly since the standard of the nunneries is improving and religious education is becoming more readily available.

Entering a nunnery offers a Tibetan woman a secure and useful life, a peer group and an outlet for her spiritual aspirations. Because the family lives of most nuns have been characterised by hardship and deprivation, they do not experience a lessening of material quality of life by entering a nunnery. In Taiwan, by comparison, women are less likely even to have had more than a passing encounter with Buddhism, their standard of education and breadth of life experience provide them with many alternative life choices, and yet the nuns freely choose a life which affords them far less comfort and worldly freedom than that to which they have been accustomed. Paula Arai’s comments on the contrast between lay and monastic life in Japan could be applied to Taiwan:

Sōtō nuns strive to maintain the quality of each nun through a strict disciplined lifestyle. In part this is facilitated by an increase in the quality of life and education in Japanese society as a whole, but it is precisely this increase in the quality of life in general that has bred women who seriously consider their options and deliberately choose to commit their lives to Buddhist truth. The distance between modern life and monastic life is increasing....The monastic life is not harder than it was before, it is only harder in contrast to the average lay life. Many people are daunted by the difficulty, leaving only the extremely determined and dedicated to undertake the monastic path.82

Furthermore, because the standard of living in Taiwan is high and life in a Taiwanese nunnery is simple, structured and bound by rules, the contrast between the two is great, and a nun must have faith, stamina and determination to keep going. In Tibet and India,

however, lay life is not often comfortable and has not progressed into the technological age. The physical aspects of monastic life are not so different from those of lay life and the daily routine of a monastery is generally no harder than that demanded in the home.

Most contemporary Tibetan nuns become ordained in their late teens or twenties, although a small number are as young as nine when they shave their heads, and almost all have made a personal decision, free of parental intervention, to do so. In their interviews, many stressed that it was their own choice and by their own initiative that they embarked on the life of a nun. All age-groups from teens to over eighty are represented in the nunnerys, as is also the case in Taiwan. Although the majority of Tibetan nuns in this study became nuns to fulfil their religious aspirations, there can also be found examples of nuns who chose ordination because they experienced various kinds of failure in lay life or because they thought monastic life would be easier than household life and would provide for their physical needs.

Apart from the above superficial parallels, however, it is inappropriate to compare women's spiritual aspirations. From whatever background or Buddhist tradition a woman comes, the decision to enter monastic life is a personal and momentous one, and it demands certain understandings and motivations if it is to endure and bear fruit. Tibetan nuns combine reasons for choosing the life of a nun similar to those of their Taiwanese sisters, with some distinctive ones of their own that stem from Tibet's particular situation and their place in it.

The Tibetan nuns' case histories, which have been prepared by the Tibetan Nuns' Project in Dharamsala, and my personal interviews are the main primary materials for this chapter. The contribution of oral narrative when women are expressing their religiosity is
vital; without it their complex perceptions and observations would not be so accessible. Their humour and fortitude need to be witnessed, their accounts of individual sufferings need to be heard and their hopes and spiritual ideals need to be conveyed. In this chapter, I let the nuns speak for themselves; their own words tell their stories. As with the Chinese nuns, nearly all the Tibetan nuns' responses and comments will remain anonymous. The Tibetan nuns I interviewed and talked with clearly understood fundamental Buddhist truths and the importance of philosophical study, meditation and ethical discipline. The head nun of Ganden Chöling said:

The problem is that everyone in Tibetan society knows and believes the Dharma, but few know its point and meaning. All take the time to do circumambulations, and they think this is Dharma. But it is not Dharma. We must know the meaning of what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous. If we get a lesson from a teacher about the meaning of virtue, then we know that doing circumambulation is not Dharma. It is those that give happiness to others who have virtue. To give happiness to all people is virtuous action, and to create unhappiness is non-virtuous. If we haven't received the Buddhist lessons of listening, contemplating, meditating, how can we know anything important and helpful? Becoming a nun gives us the chance to hear these truths and to find happiness.83

Many nuns with whom I talked expressed their desire to be able to study and practise Buddhism to alleviate the sufferings of this life for themselves and other beings and to bring meaning to their lives. One 27 year-old Shugsep nun who escaped from Tibet in 1992,84 describes her childhood in Tibet and the process by which she decided to seek ordination:

Since I was the second youngest child, I mostly worked in the home making food and taking care of the house. My father was uneducated and illiterate, which was the case for most of the people in my rural village. I was able to attend school for two years

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83 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, Dharamsala, 1996.
84 Almost all nuns living at Shugsep and Dolma Ling nunneries were born in Tibet, became nuns in Tibet and escaped to India in the early 1990s under extremely dangerous circumstances. The majority of Ganden Chöling nuns have lived in exile for most of their lives, while only a small number are recent arrivals in India.
when I was fifteen or sixteen. I really enjoyed the classes. I was still beginning, studying elementary levels, when I was pulled out to help work in the fields.

At this point I began to realize that the sufferings and work of a lay person are endless. I saw that this life is extremely short and spending it doing lay activities is a waste. Since I had a bit of education, I began to believe that the monastic path was the path for me to take. I told my father about my desire to become a nun. He desperately needed me around the house and told me that he was opposed to my decision. I pleaded with him and after a while he acquiesced, gave me some money, and took me to Shugsep nunnery, about one day’s drive from Lhasa.85

A 31 year-old Dharamsala nun, who is presently unaffiliated with any nunnery while she lives with her mother who requires care, said:

I thought that if I became a nun it would be useful to all beings. It is easier as a nun to help sentient beings. If I were not a nun I would have to think solely about my family members, and this is a very limited view. It is not good to be a lay person who can only help a few; one has to put energy into only a small number. It is selfish. A nun can help beings with all the power she has. In the beginning, I lived like a nun anyway, and I liked the life. It was when I was eleven that I first began to think about these things. I was tough when I was young and decided on my own to finally take the step. I want to help beings freely. I must be free to do this work; I really want to help people, it is my whole life.86

A Ganden Choling nun, who was born in Tibet in 1926, decided at the age of ten to become a nun for similar reasons:

At the age of eight, I began school, studying Tibetan and other basic subjects. Two years later my mother died unexpectedly in childbirth, leaving our family in deep shock. At this point, I had already decided to become a nun. I was greatly drawn to Buddhism and I realized at that young age that marriage is an obstacle to intense Buddhist practice and therefore limits the number of people one can benefit in one’s lifetime. My father happily agreed to my decision. Having become aware of the uncertainty of worldly life after my mother died, two of my older sisters also decided to become nuns.87

A 23 year-old Ganden Choling nun, who was born of Tibetan parents in Arunachal

85 Shugsep nunnery case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
86 Personal interview, Dharamsala, March 1996.
87 Ganden Choling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, November 1994.
Pradesh in north-eastern India, also explained that she became a nun to make her life meaningful:

I became a nun when I was eighteen. I felt that being a nun would make my life more useful. This decision would benefit all sentient beings, my parents and me by setting an imprint for future lives. I'd be able to practise Buddhism at my full capacity thereby generating greater compassion and wisdom for the benefit of all sentient beings. My parents, being devout Buddhists, were happy with my decision with one condition: I must keep my vows for the remainder of my life.88

Unlike in Taiwan, it is very difficult for girls in isolated regions of Tibet to receive an education. There are few schools and besides, young girls are often required by their families to herd animals and take part in household chores from morning until night. Taiwanese nuns, often already highly educated, primarily seek an additional religious education as nuns, but the majority of Tibetan nuns also view ordination as a means of obtaining secular education which they have been unable to get elsewhere. Many nuns explained that one of their main reasons for ordination was to undertake a more useful life than that offered in the fields, to learn to read Tibetan and also to fulfil their spiritual ambitions. A Dolma Ling nun, who escaped from Tibet in 1994, after becoming a nun, explained this situation:

I have always wanted to be a nun. I learnt that by being a nun I could contribute towards the well being of all the sentient beings. The other reason is to receive an education. In our country, it is not possible to get educated unless you enter a nunnery or a monastery. I became a nun when I was seventeen years old, and my parents supported me.89

One 26 year-old Dolma Ling nun said:

I never went to school. It was a two-day walk to the nearest school and of course my parents needed my help at home. At age thirteen, I wanted to become a nun, but my older sister convinced my parents that I was too young. But at seventeen, I told my

88 Ganen Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, November 1994.
89 Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
parents that I wanted to go on a pilgrimage to Lhasa. I wanted to practise Buddhism and I knew I would not get a chance to do that if I stayed home. Nuns have the chance to work and study and to be religious, and that is what I told my parents in order for them to let me become a nun and go to Lhasa.90

Another Dolma Ling nun, who escaped from Tibet in 1990, had similar wishes for an education:

When I was about thirteen or fourteen years old, I walked to a village one day's walk from ours and there I saw some nuns and they were doing Buddhist debate and all of a sudden I realized that this was a place where I could get an education too. I watched them and saw their life and I thought it was a good life. So I decided to become a nun so I could get an education and have a better life than being a shepherd girl.91

Another Dolma Ling nun, who went to school in Tibet for three years from the age of eight, but who was forced to quit because Chinese students received priority over Tibetans unless a large bribe could be offered, expressed her disappointment at having to stop her education and explained that she became a nun to continue that education:

At the age of seventeen, I became a nun so I could go to school again. I wanted to help others and I wanted a better life. I did not want to be a farmer or get married.

This experience was shared by another Dolma Ling nun who went to school from the age of seven but was forced to leave when she was twelve. She too enjoyed studying, and discovered that nuns could receive some education in the nunneries:

When I was twelve I had to leave school. I cried and begged to stay but my parents said they needed me to work....I had heard about a boarding school about a half-hour walk from our home and said I wanted to go to school there. I had heard that the school was really good and gave a fine education. It was all Tibetan students, about 400 boys and girls, and cost money to go.

She went on her own and took the admission examination hoping that her grades would

90 Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, December 1994.
91 Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, December 1994.
convince her parents to allow her to attend, but they refused. Feeling frustrated, she decided immediately that some day she would get an education, although she had no idea how. Then, after a few more years, she visited Lhasa and came upon the well-known Tsamkung Nunnery:

I visited the nunnery called Tsamkung but I actually thought the people I saw there were monks. I had never seen nuns before. There were no nuns in my village. When I realized that they were nuns and that there was a place for them to study and pray together just like the monks I decided to become a nun....I did not like my life as a shepherd because all I could think about was the fact that I was not learning with the other children and I wanted to learn so much.\(^\text{92}\)

Village and nomad life in Tibet is extremely hard and many nuns described the sufferings of their parents and neighbours and the effect it had on their wish to escape such a life and follow a beneficial life of religion. Not only do village-dwellers have to work hard in the fields and doing burdensome tasks around their homes, but illness and premature death are constant spectres. Many women die in childbirth because medical care is not readily available. The daily physical struggle, and the sickness and death of family members are significant and frequent motivators in the nuns' explanations of their reasons for ordination. A 27 year-old Shugsep nun described a traumatic family occurrence which contributed to her decision to become a nun:

I have wanted to become a nun almost my whole life. When I was seven, my older sister died giving birth. Her death caused a lot of pain and suffering for my family. I began to see that there is no meaning in this life and I wanted to avoid the sufferings and futility of lay life. When I was seven, I told my parents I wanted to become a nun. They didn't want me to become a nun because I was the youngest in the family. I was very pampered by my parents, and they also needed my brother and me to help them on the farm. After many years, they finally agreed and I was thirteen when I offered my hair to Tulku Jigme Dorje at Shugsep Nunnery.\(^\text{93}\)

\(^ {92}\) Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, December 1994.

\(^ {93}\) Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
Another Shugsep nun, born near Lhasa in 1972, gave similar reasons for her ordination:

At an early age I saw how hard my parents worked and all the hardship they had to endure. I realized how rare and precious it is to get a human birth and I wanted to do something something constructive with this life that would benefit both myself and others. I decided that the best way for me to attain these goals would be to enter the monastic system and become a nun.94

A 24 year-old Ganden Chöling nun who escaped from central Tibet in 1990 explained her reasons for ordination:

We have to think about the future and work towards getting a good incarnation in our next life. We would say prayers for the freedom of Tibet and prayers for people in prison. I saw how difficult life had been for my parents. They had many children to look after and they were very poor. I knew that it would be the same for me if I got married - that I would have lots of children and have to find some way to feed and clothe them all. So when I was eighteen I went to become a nun.95

I interviewed two Dolma Ling nuns, who have been friends ever since they escaped from Tibet together in the large group of nuns in 1990. Both described the suffering of their parents and how the householder's life can give no respite from worldly and meaningless work:

I saw the suffering of my parents and felt that lay life in general was full of suffering. I feel that the nun's life can be free of this, that it gives the opportunity to practise Dharma in this life and improve future lives. I felt that I was already a nun at the age of three; I never felt good wearing lay clothes and I used to wear a red chuba [woman's traditional long dress] and very short hair.... and,

I think lay life is no use - it is a lot of hard work for no results.96

Other nuns became ordained out of a deep-seated fear of death brought on by an understanding of impermanence, karma and the efficacy of religious practice:

94 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
95 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, July 1993.
96 Personal interview, Dolma Ling, March 1996.
I never went to school, but I took advantage of the times when I was out with the yaks to study and pray. When I was a small child, I was often very sick. I had always thought of becoming a nun because I am afraid to die and I have had a strong faith in religion for my entire life.  

Another Shugsepnun concurred:

By the age of seventeen I had decided to become a nun. Since my early years of childhood, I had always been very scared of dying and I knew I must do something truly useful in this lifetime. I also believed that by becoming a nun, my family would benefit by receiving good merit.

Like some Taiwanese nuns, a number of Tibetan nuns described their contacts with other nuns, their impressions of nuns and the nun's life and how seeing ordained women caused them to feel that they too wanted to be ordained. One nun spoke of her encounter with an older nun who was an important role model for her:

As a child I looked after the cattle herds, milked the cows and made curd. I remember quite well that when I was ten years old a nun from Changthang came to my village. And from that day on she became my role model and inspiration for becoming a nun when I grew older. When I was sixteen years old, I knew it was time for me to become a nun. At that time my aunt was also a nun in Lhasa and I wanted to join her at the nunnery...

A 27 year-old Ganden Chöling nun, whom I interviewed in Dharamsala, described her impression of monks and nuns:

At the age of seventeen, I saw monks and nuns praying and reciting in Lhasa. This made a great impression on me as they looked so happy and peaceful. All my sisters were married and had undergone great suffering. I did not want to repeat their lives in my own. I also believe that now I can be of more benefit to them, to my parents and to all beings as a nun.

A thirty year-old Dolma Ling nun, who originated in the Zanskar region of north India,

97 Shugsepnun case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
98 Shugsepnun case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
100 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
described her first experience with nuns when her family went on pilgrimage to Buddhist sacred sites in India:

Then in 1985, my whole family went for pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya. There I saw many nuns. It was my first time seeing so many nuns. I never knew till then that a woman can also live a life like the monks. After seeing them so peaceful and contented, I wanted to be a nun. I told my parents about it but they were against the idea. They too had not seen many nuns before and didn't know the good points of being a nun. I had to return home at that time. At home nothing else interested me anymore. 101

Another nun from Zanskar, who visited Dharamsala with her parents, also felt inspired to become a nun after seeing nuns in the local nunneries:

When I was fifteen years of age, I came to Dharamsala with my parents. We all stayed in Dharamsala for a year. During that time, I saw many nuns and visited some nunneries which made me think of being a nun. I decided that I would like to be ordained so I asked my parents' permission. They were very happy with my decision. 102

Other nuns believed that they could best repay the kindness of their parents by following a religious life. One nun from Dolma Ling nunnery described going to Lhasa to care for a relative's children. The experience moved her to consider her own parents' hardship and work on her behalf. Out of gratitude for all that they had done for her, she decided to become a nun. Another nun from the original Shugsep nunnery, who was raised close to Lhasa, described her wish to repay her parents' kindness:

I knew that if I became a nun, I would be able to practise Buddhism, and if I practised, I would come to understand the benefits of Buddhism: I would have compassion for human beings. With this understanding, I could take care of my parents, returning what they gave to me by raising me. I made the decision to become a nun myself; my parents were very happy with this choice, especially because I was the only child in the family to become ordained. 103

102 Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, September 1996.
103 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, September 1994.
Many marriages in Tibet and remote areas of northern India are arranged by parents without the consent of their children. Girls who wish to become nuns must often leave home to escape an unwelcome marriage. One nun described the situation in eastern Tibet:

In my place, the girl's parents give them away in marriage without telling them. They prepare everything, like the barley beer, quietly, without the girl knowing. And when the time is about to come for her to go away, they send her to her relatives for a few days. In the meantime they would prepare everything. Then they call her back and suddenly tell her. Then four or five men would catch her and dress her up. She would cry a lot. After getting her dressed, they put her on a horse and she cries a lot. We don't even know who we're getting married to. The tradition was like that.  

Several nuns described their experiences of avoiding marriage, including one young Ganden Chöling nun who was born in eastern Tibet:

I decided when I was still a child that I wanted to be a nun. In my village, I only went to school for a few months, just enough to learn the alphabet, but then my family needed me on the farm. When I was eleven or twelve, I found out that a few people had spoken to my parents about their sons marrying me. I didn't want to get married! Married life is difficult and not useful. It is better to be a nun, and devote your life to practising Buddhism, so that in the future you may have a good life and reach enlightenment.

There was a Sera lama named Thupden Yangphel who came to our village to do a teaching. At the teaching I had to wear a chuba and gold jewellery. I thought it was vain and useless and just for show. So I went to the lama later and asked him to ordain me. He asked if I had my parents' permission. I lied and said yes. I was ordained in Kham Tsokzong at age fourteen, but when my parents found out, my father didn't speak to me for one month.  

The majority of Tibetan nuns interviewed decided on the nun's life of their own free will and out of their own conviction in the religious path, and were not persuaded to take ordination by their parents. In many cases, in fact, their parents vigorously opposed it because of the constant work involved in their nomadic or agricultural lives, or because they would have nobody to care for them in their old age. Some nuns, however, were  

104 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1993.  
105 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1993.
strongly encouraged to take nuns' vows by parents who believed it would be beneficial for them or for the family as a whole, while other parents only gave encouragement if their daughter felt she could keep her precepts. This nun was placed in Tibet's Shugsep Nunnery by her parents:

My parents went to consult a high lama and he told them that if I became a nun it would be very positive. I was ten years old when they told me that they were going to enrol me at the nunnery. I had never thought about it before then, but I was glad because I did not like school very much. I spent about six months at home after they removed me from school and then I was enrolled at Shugsep Nunnery outside of Lhasa. 106

One 27 year-old Shugsep nun, whom I interviewed, described her parents' strong involvement in her ordination:

My parents literally ordered me to become a nun. In my village there were no other Samgha members and so I was very nervous in case I could not be a good nun. My uncle went to a holy place and did a divination which came out positively in favour of taking ordination, so I was relieved. My uncle taught me to read and write and then I was admitted to Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok's nunnery in Kham. After six years I sent a message to my mother to come and receive her novice vows too. 107

Other nuns were encouraged also, but less forcefully:

My family was very religious. We said prayers a lot, kept offering bowls, and had butter lamps lit at the temples of Lhasa. During the New Year, we also did special services. My parents talked to me about becoming a nun. My mother said that if I could practise well, it would be very good for my karma, but she warned me that if I couldn't keep my vows, it was better not to ever take them. Even though they encouraged me the decision to be a nun has to be left to the individual. 108

and,

My family had talked to me before about becoming a nun. They told me that it's good. If you are a lay woman you commit a lot of bad actions. 109

106 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
107 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
108 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1993.
109 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1993.
Many nuns also cited future lives as an important reason for ordination. They explained that this life is the tool with which to create a useful future life in which one may have the freedom and knowledge to practise Buddhism and to continue to be of benefit to others. Because of this, becoming a nun in this life has significant ramifications with regard to the next life, rather than being of only short-term benefit. Two Shugsep nuns to whom I spoke described their motivations for receiving nun’s vows:

If one becomes a nun in this life, it is very important for this and future lives and it is also good for one’s parents. I lived a nomad life in eastern Tibet managing domestic animals. This caused me to commit many negative actions. I had to make cow dung into fuel for the fire and in doing this I killed untold numbers of insects. Because of these actions, I could have an unfortunate rebirth, so I believe it is important to purify these actions and ensure a positive future rebirth. The best way to do this is to be a nun. My previous kind of lifestyle has absolutely no benefit for this life.110

Her friend, a 24 year-old nun, agreed:

I escaped with two nuns to India, from an arranged marriage in Lhasa. When I lived at home, I had always said that if I could be a nun, this would be perfect, as being a nun or a monk is very important. But I believe that the most important thing is the quality of the monk or nun. When I first arrived in India, I began school, but I soon decided to be a nun as it is more beneficial for this and future lives.111

Several nuns, who had come from large poor families in Tibet, described the financial burden of children upon their parents and explained that they believed leaving home and becoming a nun would ease the situation. A 26 year-old Ganden Chöling nun said:

I spent two years at Gari Nunnery. Having grown up in such a large family, I felt, for one thing, it would ease the pressure on our finances if I left and became a nun. It was a hard decision to make, but a good one.112

A Dolma Ling nun, who escaped from Tibet in 1990, described the financial difficulties of her family:

110 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
111 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
112 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, August 1993.
When I was young, I was made to work in the fields with other young children. The Chinese were very harsh. If we were only five minutes late, much money was deducted from our pay. We were paid by how much work we did. When I was ten years old, I went to live with some relatives in Lhasa because my family was having financial difficulties. There I worked as a cattle herder. When I was seventeen years old, I decided to become a nun. I felt this was a wise decision because I would no longer be a financial burden to my family, I would receive an education, and being a nun would help me in my next life. 113

There were also some singularly unique answers to my question concerning monastic purpose. A 58 year-old Ganden Chöling nun, whom I interviewed, answered my question about why she became a nun with a rhetorical question of her own: "Why did you become a nun?". Her obvious meaning was that if I was a nun, I should know why she became a nun and that we shared a common aim and understanding.

The young age at which many Tibetan girls develop an urge to become a nun is surprising, but of even more interest is the strength of their conviction in the nun's vows. None of the nuns in this study who expressed a desire to be a nun at a very young age had trivial or meaningless reasons for their decisions, as can already be seen from some of the above replies made by young nuns. A 23 year-old Shugsep nun, who was also very young when the idea to be a nun first crystallised in her mind, said:

I knew from when I was very young that I wanted to become a nun. I saw that if I stayed at home my life would be meaningless. By renouncing lay life, I sacrifice marriage and children, but I felt good about my decision. When I was little, I would always go off by myself and enjoy the solitude. I knew my nature was better suited to be alone and pray and I wanted to put this life towards more significant ends. When I was thirteen, I finally told my parents of my decision to enter monastic life.114

Another Shugsep nun, who wanted to be a nun at the age of ten, talked of the positive merit to be accrued by becoming a nun:

114 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
I remember as early as the age of ten wanting to become a nun, but my parents would not allow me until I was twenty years old. I knew if I were to become a nun that I would not only collect good merit for myself but for my parents as well.\textsuperscript{115}

A third Shugsep nun, 26 years old, described the sense of universal family she felt, when at the young age of thirteen, she decided to be a nun:

When I was thirteen years old, I thought of becoming a nun. They say that when you become a nun you sacrifice having a family, but I always believed that everyone and everything was my family. I did not feel as if I had to sacrifice anything.\textsuperscript{116}

The determination in this Dolma Ling nun’s statement about her wish to become a nun at the age of ten, is clearly evident:

I first got the idea of being a nun when I was about ten years old. I cut my hair short then and would not let it grow long. I looked like I was just a girl with short hair, but I was really a girl who was going to be a nun. I just knew it.\textsuperscript{117}

An additional decision which had to be made by many of the Tibetan nuns now living in India and Nepal was the choice of exile rather than remaining in nunneries in Tibet. Almost all the exile nuns who have recently come from Tibet expressed sadness at having had to leave their homeland and a wish to return in the future if the circumstances permit it. They viewed leaving as the only option, often after years of trying to coexist with the Chinese and make their monastic lives work in Tibet. Many of them eventually realised that Communist interference in their lives was too pervasive to bear. Others had been taking part in political activities and were compelled to escape, but the final decision was usually not taken without pain. A Shugsep nun told of her frustration with the Chinese and their control over her religious studies:

When I was seventeen or eighteen I began to feel that I should become a nun so that I could practise to benefit both my family and all sentient beings. It was an urge that

\textsuperscript{115} Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
\textsuperscript{116} Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
\textsuperscript{117} Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, December 1994.
came from within me and it became an ardent desire. I realized that I did not wish to lead an ordinary life of marriage and childbirth.

I told my parents about my feelings, and they supported my decision. When I was twenty, I went to Tsering Jong, a small nunnery in Lhoka, and offered my hair to Konchok Rinpoche. I spent two years at Tsering Jong. I had very few responsibilities there and focused on studying the texts. Despite the amount of free time that I enjoyed there, I still felt the oppression of the Chinese very strongly. They claim that there is religious freedom in Tibet, but that is not the case. The teachers and abbots at Tsering Jong had no power. The Chinese controlled the number and identity of the nuns admitted ... The Chinese held meetings at the nunnery every day. They told us that since the nunnery was under their rule, we had to abide by their rules.

After two years there I could no longer stand the stifling of the Chinese presence. In 1990, I decided to come to India to receive a blessing from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, to get a better education, and to experience true religious freedom.118

Another nun, born in 1971 and now living in the exile Shugsep Nunnery, told how she decided to escape to India before she became a nun so that she would be free to follow her own aims:

The Chinese made our lives so miserable that I decided when I was fifteen that I wanted to escape to India. I hoped that there I could obtain an education, become a nun and serve the Tibetan government in some way. I began to make attempts to leave Tibet with friends, but because they refused to walk at night, we were caught and sent home every time. Finally, in 1989, when I was eighteen, I decided to go on my own. I did not tell anyone, not even my father. I simply walked out of my house and kept going.119

A third nun escaped from her village to be a nun at Shugsep Nunnery in Lhasa because her family had been won over by the Communists and they opposed her wish for ordination. Finding the situation no better in Lhasa, she left Tibet:

My older brother and sister who worked in a Chinese office were always saying that the Chinese were very good people and very friendly. We were always quarrelling about the Tibetan situation. They were partial to the Chinese and said many bad things about our Tibetan community. I didn't like this and so I decided not to stay with them. I thought of becoming a nun when I was thirteen years old. My family.

118 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
119 Shugsep case history, prepared in Dharamsala, May 1995.
told me, "It's not good to be a nun - you don't have to worry, we will find you a very nice job in the Chinese office." I refused, saying, "No, no, definitely not! Even if you kill me I am not ready to work in the Chinese office. If you don't want me to be a nun, it's OK, I will go away from here."

I went to Lhasa and heard about Shugsep Nunnery. I went directly to the nunnery, was admitted, and took my vows from Shugsep Rinpoche. In the nunnery, the Chinese didn't allow us to pray or study. They also held meetings twice a day ... Because of that problem, I wanted to leave Tibet. My friend from the same nunnery and I decided to leave Tibet and go to India where we could gain our freedom, and get a good education.120

The explanations given by the nuns of their reasons for ordination are varied, and yet there are common currents flowing through them. The majority of the nuns recognise the shortcomings of worldly life, because they have witnessed the suffering of family members and others, or have experienced a sense of the futility of the daily drudgery of family life. Household village or nomad life and its associated hardships, the prospect of an arranged marriage and motherhood, and lack of secular education must not be underestimated as being contributing factors in many nuns' choice to be ordained. In addition, most of them spoke of grasping the fundamental message of Buddhism, and they were therefore intent upon following a committed spiritual path as a result.

The Tibetan nuns generally respect their precepts and the ethical discipline those precepts enjoin. While the majority of nuns experience joy in their monastic lives, they understand that ethical discipline is the root of the Buddhist path and the key to spiritual progress. One 38 year-old Ganden Chöling nun expressed it this way:

A getsulma has 36 precepts. To try to abide in the 36 precepts very well is most important. Having the chance to keep the 36 precepts is a special privilege. One may do virtuous actions, but it is necessary to actually keep precepts too.121

120 Shugseb case history, prepared in Dharamsala, January 1994.
121 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996. See footnote 40 for an explanation of Tibetan Buddhism's division of the ten novice precepts into 36 rules.
When asked what they felt is the most important aspect of the nun’s life, many nuns said that keeping the precepts is the principal duty of a nun. A 24 year-old Shugsep nun said, "The purpose of the nun’s life is to keep her vows very well. My Guru told me to always practise very strongly, keep good discipline and practise clearly whatever I have learnt."122 Another Shugsep nun spoke in a similar way, "The most important thing for a nun to do is to have the knowledge to give teachings. In addition, a nun should keep her vows well."123 A 31 year-old nun agreed:

The most important thing for a nun to do is to keep the vows very clear. It is very important to help people. Any work a nun does should be done with a good motivation -- any work. She doesn't have to pray or read books, but the motivation is the most important thing, and having the vows as a foundation. A few nuns find it hard to keep their vows, and they take off their robes. The lama gives us the vows and tells us to keep them always, not only when someone is looking.124

Other nuns named meditation as the most important concern of a nun, while some said they believed that practising well, studying hard, teaching Buddhism to others or serving the community are the most important duties for a nun. One nun said that living together in harmony should be the main concern of nuns, because they can then build a strong and successful monastic community upon the solid foundation of their harmonious dealings with one another.

On learning about the significance of full ordination for women, several nuns also stressed this as an important goal to aim for. One 38 year-old Dharamsala nun said:

If possible, nuns should study and become qualified like the monks, because otherwise we have no rights. If we study, we can be the same as the monks, due to our own efforts. Old nuns perhaps cannot change now, but the young and new nuns

122 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
123 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
124 Personal interview, Dharamsala, March 1996.
Her comment that old nuns may not be able to change is an important one when considering the aims and objectives of Tibetan nuns, and it reflects the changing attitudes of nuns since their exposure to the West. Many nuns who have lived in exile for several decades are content with their present situation and daily routine and with the spiritual practices they have developed and built up for themselves. Their aims are uncomplicated. They do not generally concern themselves with seeking equal opportunity for nuns, with newly instituted and complex curricula of philosophical study or with higher ordination. However, in their conversations with me, they graciously extended their moral support and enthusiasm for the efforts of younger nuns in working towards comprehensive Buddhist education and full ordination.

One sixty year-old Ganden Chöling nun, whose goal is to perfect meditation and calm abiding (shi-gnas), regretted that it was too late for her to take on new commitments:

I go to sojong and keep my vows well. I meditate and join all the prayer sessions at the main temple, but I regret that I never had a chance to study another language. It is too late for me to learn English or begin a long course of philosophical study. My eyes are no longer good enough to read much. If it weren't so problematic to carry food up the mountain, I would just go up there now and meditate, but as it is not possible, I am content to live out my days meditating in the nunnery.¹²⁶

Among the older Tibetan nuns are exceptional practitioners and meditators who have spent their lives in the pursuit of enlightenment. Their frequently shabby appearance and humble demeanour belie their spiritual achievements and it is often only after their deaths that people speak of their qualities and attainments, for they never speak of them themselves except in the most modest and brief way. Ani Gomchen, who was born in

¹²⁵ Personal interview, Dharamsala, March 1996.
¹²⁶ Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
Tibet in 1906 and passed away in Dharamsala in 1996, having spent many years of her life in retreat, is now widely thought of as an accomplished meditator and her name, 'Ani Gomchen' (Great Meditator Nun), was given to her by the head nun of her nunnery in Dalhousie after His Holiness the Dalai Lama himself visited her in her room and spoke with her about her practice. 127

Many older nuns who fled Tibet soon after the 1959 Lhasa Uprising and its suppression have been ordained since their youth in Tibet, and speak eagerly about their strong feeling for the monastic life. Others received their nun's precepts later in their lives after marital separation, the death of a husband or children or other life crisis. One 84 year-old Ganden Chöling nun, who met and married her husband at the age of eighteen in Lhasa, and whose two children also died there, described her experience:

In 1959, my husband, who was in the Tibetan army, accompanied His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he fled to India. Several months later, I fled from Tibet in order to join my husband....I stayed in Kalimpong for three years looking for my husband because I missed him very much. Eventually, I learned that my husband had left India and gone to Switzerland. We lost contact, and I never saw him again...

At the age of 63, I lost my eyesight and went to Ludhiana, in the Punjab, for an operation which partially restored the vision in my right eye. At that time I decided to become a nun because I felt that my life as a lay person was no longer useful. I wanted to practise Buddhism until the end of my life....Although I was initially upset that my husband and I became separated, in retrospect I am grateful because it gave me the opportunity to become a nun and develop a Buddhist practice. I am happy at Ganden Chöling Nunnery and wish to remain here. I participate in all the rituals and ceremonies with the nuns and I will continue to do so as long as my health allows.128

Another 74 year-old Ganden Chöling nun talked about her life in Tibet, and the events which led to her ordination at the age of 48:

When I was 21 years old, my uncle attempted to arrange a marriage for me. He was

128 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, August 1994.
in the military and had found an officer's son as my groom. But I heard about it and
didn't want him, so I ran away to a place called Medrogonkar. I met a man named
Wangda and married him for love...

When I was 25 years old, I gave birth to twin boys, but they both died. Then the
Chinese came. My husband went with the resistance movement and I was left alone.
One day a man came and gave me a message from my husband. He said, "Do
whatever you want or need to do. I will fight until my life is sacrificed." I tried to
find information about him but couldn't hear anything definite, although I did hear that
he was in prison. I was very unhappy then, and thought it might be better to go to
India....

I went to Varanasi and then to Dharamsala. In Dharamsala, I gave birth to a son, who
is now a monk in Namgyal Monastery. I went to do road work, earning half a rupee
a day. I did this work for many years. I became a nun when I was 48 years old, the
year before the unlucky year for women. I had been very sick and went to Lama
Tenzin Gyaltse to ask for his prayers. Without doing a divination, he told me that if
I became a nun it would save my life....I felt I knew nothing about Dharma. He said,
"Being wealthy does not bring you enlightenment. The same is true of education.
The most important thing is to help other people and to never cause harm. If you
become a nun and do these things, it will remove all your obstacles." 129

A seventy year-old Ganden Chöling nun, who entered into an arranged marriage and had
four daughters, briefly explained her situation:

[When we escaped from Tibet] we were sent to a settlement in Orissa. It was a very
difficult time, a terrible time, then....My husband died and I became a nun when I was
52 years old. His death showed me the suffering of life. I have seen much over the
years, and I thought the most beneficial life would be spent practising Dharma. I
don't know reading and writing or have much knowledge, but I do what I can.

When asked about her aim in life, she laughed, and said:

I am old. I would like to go to America, or to heaven, but there is no path for this
now. My goal is the cremation ghats. My goals are really very simple. 130

As she says, her goals are simple and so are the goals of many of the elderly Tibetan
nuns. Elderly nuns in Taiwan also often retreat to the mountains or remain within their
nunneries to concentrate on spiritual practice, sūtra reading and meditation; they too do

129 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, August 1993.
130 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, August 1993.
not frequently concern themselves with the complex pan-Taiwan issues of monastic education and training, with Buddhist propagation or with the important but peripheral matters with which many young and radical Taiwanese nuns are involved. However, they are not as isolated or out of touch with worldly matters as their Tibetan counterparts. Their standard of education and worldly experience is greater and they are still acquainted with global events and national issues.

Most young Tibetan nuns in this study, particularly those who have recently come from Tibet, hold high hopes because of their age, physical stamina and determination, of returning to Tibet to teach Buddhism to those nuns who have not been able to receive a religious education during the Communist occupation. The political circumstances surrounding Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora have created unique aspirations within these Tibetan nuns, many of whom have become deeply politicized, and a desire to work for the freedom of Tibet.

Because Dolma Ling Nunnery is offering the most comprehensive Buddhist education currently available to Tibetan nuns, almost all of its nuns who recently fled Tibet and have fresh memories of the horrors occurring in their homeland, expressed a desire to return to Tibet and teach anybody who wishes to learn. A nineteen year-old Dolma Ling nun said, "I am willing to teach whoever needs me. I would be happy to teach lay people or nuns. It does not matter to me." A 24 year-old Dolma Ling nun, who left Tibet in 1990, emphasised how she also would like to teach anyone:

I come from an uneducated village. I would like to go back to Tibet and teach in my village. I do not care if I teach lay people or kids or what. I want to go back to teach whether Tibet is free or not. I hope that Tibet will be free soon, but even if that does not happen soon I would like to go home and teach....I have tried to study hard so I will be a good teacher when I do go back. To grow up just knowing the alphabet is
not a good thing. 131

A Shugsep nun told me:

The most important things a nun should do are to study hard, learn Dharma very well and teach. My own goal is to return to my area of Amdo Gyarong and teach my people - they have a very strong and distinctive accent and so they need to learn from somebody who can speak their dialect. 132

Another 25 year-old Shugsep nun spoke of her wish to teach nuns:

If I get a good education, and can study philosophy and debate, and practise Buddhism, I would like to return to Tibet and teach the nuns in my village, or work as a translator for them in the nunnery. In this way, perhaps we could encourage more girls in my village to become nuns, because at the moment there aren't many. 133

A 27 year-old Ganden Chöling nun also wants to teach nuns:

My goals as a nun are to study philosophy well, and then when Tibet gets her freedom, to go back and teach. In Tibet, I left behind an empty place made especially for debate at Gari Nunnery. I would like to see the nuns using this space. Given the opportunity, I believe they can go very high and have an excellent understanding. 134

A 28 year-old Dolma Ling nun expressed her wish to teach nuns in Tibet:

There is a small nunnery near my village and someday I would like to teach there. I think they may have 29 or so nuns there. I could teach the nuns there what I am learning here and share my education with them. They have been nuns for so long without the benefit of teachings. I could change that for them. 135

Another 23 year-old Dolma Ling nun wants to establish a nunnery herself:

My goal for the future is to go back to my village and be a teacher. I would like to start a small nunnery there for nuns who are still there and for others who want to become nuns. Right now there is no nunnery and nowhere for nuns to study. They live at home and try to do the best they can on their own. I am studying hard so I can

131 Dolma Ling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, December 1994.
132 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
133 Shugsep Nunnery case history, prepared in Dharamsala, September 1994.
134 Ganden Chöling case history, prepared in Dharamsala, August 1994.
do this work. And I will whether Tibet is free or not. There are so few schools in the villages and there are no schools for nuns at all. I would like to change that.

Many of the young nuns embrace strong political views and have previously been arrested in Tibet for counter-revolutionary activities and participating in demonstrations, often being imprisoned under inhumane conditions and undergoing frequent torture. They wish to continue their political activities in exile for the freedom of Tibet. I talked with a 28 year-old Ganden Chöling nun who had been in prison three times in Tibet and had suffered considerable harm from torture:

I am usually one of the main representatives at political gatherings and I was very political in Tibet. My aim is to do this political work to help regain Tibet. I marched in the 1995 Peace March to Delhi with ten other nuns.

Other Tibetan nuns have spiritual aspirations similar to those of many Taiwanese nuns, whose lives are not complicated by political turmoil and whose participation within society is expected and sought. A significant part of a Taiwanese nun's work is within Buddhist society. They do not allow their religious practices to keep them from society, rather they carry their practice into society: working with society is an important part of their practice. Although Tibetan nuns are not yet enabled to contribute in a major way to lay society, and it has not been the custom in Tibet for them to do so, many nuns are voicing their wish to work with lay people. A 38 year-old nun expressed her wish to be socially active:

As I am from a remote area of Tibet, I should go back there and teach children Dharma and to read and write. Also His Holiness the Dalai Lama told us that Christian monks and nuns have clinics and schools, so if Tibetan nuns could do the same that would be good -- I'd like to be like Mother Teresa. My mind wants to be like her, but physically I don't know if I have her energy. Work like that is a meditation. It is better to do social work than spend five years in a cave and not

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137 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
An ex-Tilokpur nun said, "I want to help poor children learn to read and write. I also want to help handicapped people." One Dolma Ling nun wants to be a Tibetan medical practitioner. Another Dolma Ling nun wants to become a geshe. She said, "The lay people need the strong example of woman and nun practitioners, and the nuns need the role model of educated and strong nuns."

Many nuns want to be meditators and train in concentration and wisdom; others want to study well and learn the texts. There are nuns who want to benefit all sentient beings and develop compassion: "My present goals are to benefit all sentient beings by praying and practising the Buddhadharma." Other nuns simply want to be good nuns, to practise well, to do virtuous actions, to recite carefully their daily prayers or to enter a long retreat.

Some nuns had not previously heard of the lineage of full ordination for nuns, while others knew that there had been a few bhikṣuṇīs in Tibet in the past, but not enough to transmit a valid ordination lineage. When I explained the purpose of full ordination for nuns and its implications for uplifting the nuns' tradition, most nuns became enthused, and readily accepted the importance of full ordination for novices. Some of the younger novices want to become bhikṣuṇīs as soon as the possibility presents itself. However, almost all expressed their intention to wait for the Dalai Lama to give his permission based on the certainty and concensus of the Patriarchs and Heads of Buddhist traditions that the bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage is valid. The head nun of Ganden Chöling explained the situation where Tibetan nuns are waiting for the decision of the Dalai Lama, a decision

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139 Personal interview, Dharamsala, March 1996.
140 Personal interview, Dolma Ling Nunnery, March 1996.
which is apparently so complicated that it has been pending for eighteen years:

If His Holiness says to go ahead, most nuns would do it. They would all follow his advice. I myself would do it very quickly. Taiwan has issued invitation letters to Tibetan nuns in the past, but as the nuns didn't think the Mūlasarvāstivādin lineage had a pure bhikṣuṇī lineage, they didn't show interest or respond. They didn't take up the offer. It is clear that Taiwanese Buddhists respect Tibetan Buddhism. If His Holiness would give his agreement and show a perfect way and give us an explanation of any lineage, the nuns will go. Keeping the bhikṣuṇī precepts accumulates more merit than keeping the novice precepts. 141

Another 39 year-old Ganden Chöling nun expressed her thoughts about bhikṣuṇī (gelongma) vows:

If there is the chance to receive gelongma vows, I will do it. Without the support of the monks, nuns cannot do anything at the present time. Take sojong [confession] for example. I have faith in the monks, but if we were gelongmas, it would be possible for us to do everything without the intervention of the monks. 142

Another 60 year-old Ganden Chöling nun joked about the number of precepts a bhikṣuṇī must hold:

If His Holiness says to go ahead with gelongma ordination, I would like to become fully ordained. The many vows means I could never go out and that would suit me fine! It is good for all the nuns to follow His Holiness when he makes an announcement on this issue. It will make the nuns equal with the monks in that way at least, and it will pave the way for equality in other areas as well. 143

A 24 year-old Dolma Ling nun, who was a member of the large group of nuns who prostrated their way across Tibet and walked to exile said:

It is extremely important to become a gelongma. If I have the chance, I want to do so. A human life is difficult to obtain, and in this life I have had the chance to be a getsulma. If I also get the chance to be a gelongma, that would be truly amazing. 144

141 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
142 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
143 Personal interview, Ganden Chöling, March 1996.
144 Personal interview, Dolma Ling, February 1996.
The head nun at Tilokpur Nunnery, Bhikṣuṇī Pema Tsultrim, who received her bhikṣuṇī precepts in Hong Kong in 1984 and who is one of seven bhikṣuṇīs at Tilokpur, spoke of her experience. She said that many nuns at Tilokpur want to become bhikṣuṇīs, but that they have not got a good understanding of what it means. She believes that education and explanations of its relevance and importance are needed to propel the nuns forward. In her own case, it was not until she had been to Hong Kong and experienced the ceremony of ordination and witnessed the Chinese bhikṣuṇī tradition in action that she fully appreciated the impact the ordination has on a nun and its significance in her religious life.

She and other bhikṣuṇīs at Tilokpur expressed their feelings about the internal change that took place in them after they became bhikṣuṇīs, and they all felt aware of the added responsibilities and moral disciplines involved in full ordination. However, the head nun also pointed out that, because it has no full ordination, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition cannot offer any circumstances within which a bhikṣuṇī can express herself or can maintain the changed ordination status. She even expressed her delight at speaking with me which rekindled the emotions she experienced during her ordination and her feeling of being a part of the bhikṣuṇī lineage.145

Several nuns had not heard of the existence of a bhikṣuṇī lineage in the Chinese Buddhist tradition, while others believed that His Holiness is working on validating the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage for bhikṣuṇīs. There is clearly some confusion over this issue and, while almost all nuns would like to be fully ordained, they are uncertain about what it will entail and how it will eventually come about. Although a dual bhikṣuṇī ordination was offered by the Chinese Buddhist master Hsing-yün Fa-shih in Bodh Gaya, India, in

Bhiksuni Pema Tsultrim (left), head nun of Tilo kpur Kagyu nunnery, with my friend and translator Venerable Konchok Dolma. Pema Tsultrim was ordained as a bhiksuni in Hong Kong in 1984 and was a member of the first group of Tibetan nuns to receive bhiksuni ordination in recent times.
early 1998, only a handful of Tibetan nuns out of 132 women from 24 countries and many Buddhist traditions attended, because Tibetan nuns had been advised at a high level not to go.

Two nuns, both presently unaffiliated with any established nunnery, expressed their thoughts to me. One said she wanted to be a bhikṣuṇī but that she had heard that a pure lineage has not been found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. The other said that His Holiness has not yet said whether any lineage is pure and so she is waiting, even though she thinks it is very important to be a bhikṣuṇī. A third nun, from Shugsep Nunnery, said she had not heard of the Chinese bhikṣuṇī tradition and that the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī lineage is broken. Correct information is not filtering out to the nuns themselves and in the meantime, they continue to wait for something to happen.

Perhaps, however, a 23 year-old Dolma Ling nun made the most sage comment:

It is very important to receive gelongma ordination, but the main thing is the motivation and the mind. If that is not there, then there is no use to simply take the precepts for the sake of it only.

Many lay Tibetans also agree that full ordination would benefit the Nuns' Order and would also benefit Tibetan society, particularly if each nun follows a virtuous path and has sound motivations for her choice, as the previous nun also stated. A Tibetan teacher explained his views:

Nuns should be fully ordained. Women should feel that the choice is there. Frankly, many older rinpoches are not helpful, so it is going to have to depend upon each individual. It is not necessarily the institution of full ordination which will help, but each individual gelongma -- it is up to the integrity of the individual. Lay Tibetan practice of religion is not that high. They go and sit in the rain and sun to listen to teachings but are they really listening? But Tibetans are religious-minded, and gelongmas could be of great benefit to Tibetan society.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Personal interview, Dharamsala, February 1996.
It appears that Tibetan society may be ready for nuns to play a more active role, because many Tibetans are disillusioned with the behaviour of some monks and feel that nuns should be given a chance to reach their potential and assume some responsibility. A Tibetan aristocrat told me he believes that, "generously speaking, only fifteen per cent of the monkhood have a vocation. The rest of them do it merely as an occupation." Many Tibetans feel that the quality of the monks is lower than that of the nuns, even though they have full ordination as a virtual right and are presented with more opportunities for religious education. One official said that "monks spend up, watch videos and generally misbehave more than nuns." A female shopkeeper said that "in many cases nuns' devotion to Dharma is stronger than monks.'

Laypeople also generally expressed the view that monks and nuns should be more involved in social work, medicine and education as they are in other Buddhist traditions. One man said:

There should be more active social work by the Sangha among the lay community. Tibetan society is supposed to be religious, but it is becoming very rough. Individuals should be disciplined to be soft and compassionate. The Sangha should set a good example in this regard. Like the role played by a mother in the home.

These views echo the ideas of many of the nuns themselves who have expressed their wish to be more active in society as teachers, medical practitioners and social workers. Perhaps in the future with increased religious education and the introduction of full ordination, Tibetan nuns will begin taking on an additional mission: working among their society as Taiwanese monastics do.

147 Informal discussion, Dharamsala, October 1993.
148 Personal interviews, Dharamsala, February 1996.
149 Informal discussion, Dharamsala, February 1996.
It is clear that Tibetan nuns place great value on and give primacy to their lives as nuns. Despite their difficult physical and material circumstances and their struggle even to build nunnery and gather essential equipment, they hold to their spiritual practice. It does not depend on beautiful nunnery. Clearly it depends on their understanding of Buddhism. Two elderly nuns in Dharamsala live in a dilapidated tent in the rhododendron forest and they do not complain. None of the nuns in this study mentioned physical hardship in the nunnery as a difficulty. Instead, they only spoke of their own inadequacies and shortcomings in undertaking strenuous philosophical study, in ridding their minds of delusive emotions and in coping with ill-health.

When asked what they would do if they were prevented from following the nun's life, their sentiments and evident commitment echoed those of Taiwanese nuns. Several said they would commit suicide, while others said they would remain unmarried and study Buddhist texts, become teachers or take care of handicapped children and orphans. It is clear from their answers to this question that the Tibetan nuns view marriage and family life as a major obstacle to full-time Buddhist practice and as being bound up with difficulties and sufferings. None expressed a wish to marry if they were not nuns. A young Dolma Ling nun said:

If my parents had tried to stop me being a nun, I would have escaped and become a nun somewhere else. If that had not been possible, at least I would never have married.\textsuperscript{150}

Tibetan nuns are making strong progress to overcome what His Holiness the Dalai Lama described to me as their own inferiority complex.\textsuperscript{151} Although it is a moot point as to whether the complex arose first or the discrimination against the nuns which reinforces

\textsuperscript{150} Personal interview, Dolma Ling, March 1996.

\textsuperscript{151} Private audience, Dharamsala, December 1994.
that complex, the nuns are standing up to claim their rightful place in Tibetan monastic life. A Shugsep nun confirmed this:

Every year the situation for nuns is improving. The main thing, therefore, is one's own purpose. The education is there now - it is up to the individual to take advantage of the opportunities existing now. It is up to each person; the mind is the same. 152

A Dolma Ling nun agreed:

There is the same level of opportunity for both monks and nuns now. If the nuns put in the effort, by debate and study, they can reach the same point. It is also dependent upon karma. If many lamas are reborn male to help monks, then also many women should decide to be reborn female to help nuns. 153

Another Dolma Ling nun referred to the 'inferiority complex' theory, but is convinced that nuns have the same abilities as monks:

Nuns think they are low, but actually now they have virtually the same opportunities. Because women are not as brave as men, they think they are lower themselves. It depends upon the individual - if she thinks she is lower than men, then this is the case. If the opportunities arise for the nuns, then they can be the same. 154

A Ganden Chöling nun summed it up this way: "The main thing which can improve the situation for the nuns is education and study. This can change the position of the nuns. If we are geshes too, then there will be no need to discriminate between monks and nuns."

But an older nun, who lives alone in Dharamsala, spoke of practical concerns:

The main problem for nuns is their financial difficulties. Like at Tilokpur Nunnery, where they have to do Tārā pūjās all day to support themselves. There is no chance to study and no time for education. The monks do business, like running hotels, monastery guest houses, travelling and doing monastic 'shows' all over the world to raise money for their monasteries and their education. Nuns have no way to get money except by doing pūjās all day. If nuns could get financial support, then they could study with no need to worry and be always anxious about material conditions.

The second thing is education, not just Dharma but secular education. The nuns need

152 Personal interview, Shugsep Nunnery, March 1996.
153 Personal interview, Dolma Ling, March 1996.
154 Personal interview, Dolma Ling, March 1996.
to learn languages and have a general education so they can be useful. Of course
Dharma education is the most important, but they also need other education. On one
side the nuns are unqualified and so they have no power, and then this lack of power
makes them unable to get what they need to be qualified. However, the monks can do
everything. There are very few qualified nuns. 155

The important point is that nuns are taking their lives in hand. They are becoming aware
of the habitual and deep-seated bias against them and are galvanizing the support of one
another to quietly and ethically change the situation. It is also worth noting that 61 per
cent of Paula Arai’s Japanese lay respondants thought that, "nuns were more serious than
monks, but no one thought that monks were more serious than nuns." 156 She also
comments on other attitudes to the relative standing of monks and nuns in Sōtō Zen:

One nun unambiguously asserts what many lay people and monastics alike think. "I
think that nuns today are the ones who abide by the precepts and we are true heirs of
the Buddha Dharma." The abbess of Toyama Nisōdō reflects, however, that nuns are
not inherently better than monks. If they had what monks had - rich temples, children,
money, power, rank, knowledge - nuns would not be as good as they are. 157

Perhaps it is precisely because Tibetan nuns live simple, uncluttered and uncorrupted lives
similar to their counterparts in ancient India at the time of the Buddha that they still
possess a purity, a sense of commitment and a recollection of the Buddha which has long
been missing from many monks' monasteries. And yet, Taiwanese nuns do not lack for
anything. Despite an endless supply of essentials and what are, by comparison with
Tibetan nunneries, luxurious temple complexes, they too have not lost their purity and
purpose, although many are caught up in the daily round of ceremony and temple
business.

So, is there an inherent difference between monks' and nuns' capabilities? Minds are the

155 Informal discussion, Dharamsala, February 1996.
same, innate Buddha-nature is the same, but societal and cultural conditioning, to a large extent, make them what they are. Taiwanese nuns have largely broken out of the traditional discriminatory patterns ingrained in Chinese society, while Tibetan nuns are just beginning on that path.

Taiwanese society, having greater advantages at its disposal, has come much further since 1949 than Tibetan society has progressed since 1959, and the relative situation of the two groups of nuns is evidence of the wide difference in living standard, global awareness and attitudes to gender. With the present level of Taiwanese society's development as a contributing factor, and with the heritage of their early Chinese sisters as a lineage, Taiwanese nuns have elevated the monastic life for women, and placed it firmly on the foundations they have laid.

Tibetan nuns, however, have exceptional qualities of resilience and dedication. They want to be nuns; they express joy in their lives as nuns; the majority of them keep their precepts, learn well, have enthusiasm and devotion for Buddhism and seek great results. But in contrast with the lives of ease and comfort which Taiwanese nuns work for and enjoy, their situation frequently causes them to risk their lives crossing wild Himalayan fastnesses in search of a spiritual life. Then they must often physically build their own nunneries and endure harsh living conditions. They receive meagre support and are in an inferior monastic position, and they have to continue to struggle for a religious education.

Despite the difficult external physical and material circumstances which they have described as contributing to the ordination of many of them, they possess a strong spiritual instinct and are nuns, in the words of the head nun of Thrangu Tashi Jong.
because they have as well "a genuine Dharma feeling". They too will succeed on their spiritual journey, albeit with less resources and support to back them. With increasing self-confidence and faith in their own worth, as well as growing opportunities for religious and general education through which they can learn about the world and broaden their vision and aims, they will create their place in Tibetan monasticism. It may well be that, through their integrity and achievement and by their offering an alternative model for nuns within the tradition, Tibetan Buddhism as a whole will be reinvigorated and revitalised by their contribution.

158 Discussion with Ani Tsomo, Thrangu Tashi Jong, Kathmandu, October 1995.
SECTION IV

LOOKING AHEAD

At the end of the twentieth century, Taiwanese nuns find themselves through their own efforts at an almost unprecedented level of prosperity and success. In their lives and monastic function, they are able to fulfil their own aspirations and others' expectations of them. There is an accepted place for them both in religious life and in their dealings with wider Buddhist society, and a structured system exists for them to gain the monastic qualifications they need to fulfil their spiritual roles and obligations.

The majority of Tibetan nuns, on the other hand, although having achieved a higher status and standard of living than nuns in Tibetan Buddhism have previously had, find themselves at a critical and exciting juncture in their long history. As they take part with enthusiasm in new secular and religious education programs, and in many nunneries enjoy a more stable economic situation than Tibetan nuns in the past, they have much to be optimistic about. But there is still a long way to go.

The process of modernisation and education which saw the position of Taiwanese nuns raised to the levels they are at today differs from that which is impelling the Tibetan nuns forward. Modern Taiwanese nuns have had the option of full ordination and the backing of secular education, and so their main concern has been with religious education and the building up of independent, secure nuns' communities in which to live and practise. Tibetan nuns have generally had to struggle for the basic necessities of life, without the luxury of planning for their religious education, monastic training and nunneries.
In the closing years of the twentieth century, however, they are faced with the possibility of full ordination, and many Tibetan nuns are eager for this prospect to become a reality. Even though a few of their number have already sought and received bhikṣuṇī ordination from Chinese masters, their traditional reticence is holding them back while they wait for Tibetan monastic patriarchs and Vinaya scholars to come to a consensus. Tibetan Buddhism is unusual in the Mahāyāna tradition in not having had an active bhikṣuṇī lineage and, with the issue of full ordination now so immediate for Tibetan nuns, the model of the Taiwanese nun is very relevant to them. There is much they can learn from the path Taiwanese nuns have taken, from their interpretation and portrayal of Vinaya and monasticism, and from the strength, dynamism and confidence which many of them embody as well as from their achievements.

On the other hand, however, if the two nuns' traditions continue to develop their relationship, Tibetan nuns have their own unique resilience and strength of faith and spiritual practice which they can share with their Taiwanese sisters. Although the issue of full ordination has brought the two traditions into contact, as they learn more about one another, it would be very productive if they could share the diverse aspects of their lives and experience. Tibetan nuns could certainly benefit from the Taiwanese monastic model, and from the training, deportment and discipline which is an integral element of it. They could also learn to develop confidence in their abilities as active participants in Buddhist monasticism, rather than as silent spectators. Taiwanese nuns could also teach their Tibetan sisters about social work and the reciprocal relationship which should exist between monastics and the lay community.

It would appear to be imperative that monastics develop their relationships with lay
communities and emphasise a sense of universal responsibility. With the growth of technology, globalization and rapid communication, there is a great need for religious communities to venture further into society and help restore balance to a frantic world. Taiwanese monastics, who are pioneering Buddhist monastic social work, are setting an example which can be taken up by Tibetan nuns and monks.

Conversely, Taiwanese nuns, whose lives, along with those of Taiwanese monks, are also frequently dominated by ceremony, theoretical study and temple work, could benefit from the committed and dedicated approach that Tibetan nuns embrace towards meditation, prayer and retreat. The simple and renounced lifestyle which characterises most Tibetan nuns, not just because they are poor but as a positive mental attitude, could help many Taiwanese nuns who have become accustomed to a comfortable existence. In both cases, however, there needs to be a balance between practical activities and meditation, and between formal study and self-cultivation. By sharing ideas, through mutual exchange, and even through spending time in each other’s communities, the two traditions of nuns could learn from one another’s strengths.

Tibetan nuns, however, have an additional obstacle to cross in their march to religious fulfilment. Although they are fast learning to stand up, ask for education and enunciate their aspirations and goals, they are frequently confronted by the gender-bias of the male monastic hierarchy. Taiwanese nuns generally do not face such problems. The discriminatory and inadequately informed views of many Tibetan lamas who are in decision-making positions, are also largely to blame for the tardy progress of the movement for bhikṣuṇī ordination. Despite the sage and discerning views of a few Tibetan lamas who believe that nuns of the Tibetan tradition should simply go and seek
full ordination and, with the help of Chinese masters, introduce it into Tibetan Buddhism themselves when they reach seniority twelve years later, the majority continue to deliberate around technical questions which have already been answered and which should no longer be central to the issue.

While the Tibetan nuns wait for their chance to fully take part in monastic life, Taiwanese masters are increasing their efforts to make full ordination as a bhikṣuṇī readily available to women from any tradition of Buddhism. Korean masters of the Chogye Order bestowed bhikṣuṇī ordination on ten Sri Lankan women in Sarnath, India in December 1996. Venerable Hsing-yün of Fo-kuang Shan in southern Taiwan organised a Triple Platform dual ordination ceremony in Bodh Gaya, India in February 1998. That so few Tibetan nuns participated indicates a general unwillingness to oppose the prevailing hierarchical stance. In January 1999, Master Hsing-yün conducted another dual ordination ceremony in Sri Lanka, again open to women from all Buddhist traditions. From their side, the Taiwanese monks and nuns are showing their concern for women of Buddhist monastic traditions which lack full ordination, and are demonstrating their willingness to help them rectify this situation.

Once the right to be ordained as a bhikṣuṇī has been officially extended to Tibetan nuns, there are several institutional obstacles which the new bhikṣuṇīs could face. They may experience prejudice and criticism from monks. How can the monk hierarchy suddenly adapt to the fact that Tibetan nuns, hitherto novices by definition, can also be fully ordained and should thus be accepted as full, participating members of the Saṁgha? There exists no recent historical precedent for Tibetan bhikṣuṇīs. Will institutions be established to enable fully ordained nuns to observe their increased Vinaya obligations?
Will their position in pan-monastic events be raised to that of virtual equals? Who will instruct the new bhikṣunīs? How will they themselves cope with their added responsibilities? Based on the evident enthusiasm of many Tibetan novices for bhikṣunī ordination, and on the committed way they observe their novice precepts and monastic prescriptions, it appears that, if adequate preparation, instruction and guidelines are created for the new bhikṣunīs to follow and for the monkhood to be aware of, their chances for success are good.

The new bhikṣunīs will need a safe and supportive environment in which they can maintain the additional precepts and observe the extra Vinaya disciplines. Senior Taiwanese bhikṣunīs could temporarily reside in their nunneries to instruct them in Vinaya. Naturally, Tibetan interpretation of Vinaya and monastic deportment will differ from that of the Chinese lineage within which they may have received their bhikṣunī ordination. Much of the training which is particular to Chinese Buddhism will not apply to Tibetan nuns. Chinese nuns are trained to dress and conduct themselves in Chinese robes, to eat from Chinese bowls, to bow, kneel and stand the Chinese Buddhist way, and to chant and use ritual instruments according to ancient Chinese Buddhist prayer scripts. The discipline and physical deportment behind these traditions will have to be re-interpreted by Tibetan nuns to fit in with their religious customs.

The Chinese bhikṣunī is synonymous with dignity and decorum and, while many changes must be expected when Tibetan novices become bhikṣunīs, it would be befitting if the essence and sentiment of the bhikṣunī demeanour were also transmitted to the traditions in which bhikṣunī ordination is introduced. Naturally, if it is decided that Tibetan masters may give a Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣunī ordination to Tibetan nuns and
that after twelve years those Tibetan bhikṣuṇīs may participate in bestowing dual ordination upon subsequent candidates, then matters of re-interpreting Chinese monastic deportment will not arise. A uniquely Tibetan training program could be created to prepare Tibetan novices for bhikṣuṇī ordination and the responsibilities it entails. In addition the two nuns’ traditions could beneficially share knowledge and experience about Vinaya and monastic discipline and training. Because both the Chinese and Tibetan traditions of Buddhism follow the Mahāyāna School, the scriptural background for the religious lives of the nuns is essentially similar, and the practice of Vinaya only differs in minor technical points which originate in the respective Vinaya school to which each belongs. There is a lot of common ground and great potential for interaction.

If Tibetan novices can participate in an officially sanctioned bhikṣuṇī tradition, could they become reformers of Tibetan monastic Buddhism in the same way that their Taiwanese counterparts are so integrally involved in the development of their monastic tradition? For this to happen, Tibetan nuns’ customary humility would have to be balanced with assertiveness and articulateness, and entrenched androcentric attitudes within Tibetan monasticism generally would have to be challenged. In the near future, maybe this is unlikely, but it is clear that the present wave of Tibetan nuns is beginning to offer an alternative model for future generations of nuns to aspire to. As they complete their religious education curricula and broaden their understanding of the world, they will have acquired the tools with which to generate change. If they can fortify their knowledge with experience gained from other traditions of Buddhist nuns, and even from Christian nuns, they will be empowered and qualified to function fully in their chosen role in the same way as Taiwanese nuns have been doing for decades.
Taiwanese nuns began their process for betterment from a point further along their road than Tibetan nuns and, with the added advantage of living in a technologically advanced and highly educated country, they have progressed fast. In their difficult circumstances in exile, Tibetan nuns have made remarkable progress. Their religious advancement has not been helped by the political struggles into which they have been drawn, or by prevailing Tibetan societal attitudes to women. Nor can they serve and benefit from lay society in the same way that Taiwanese nuns do.

During one of my stays at Hsiang-kuang Temple, Wu-yin Fa-shih initiated a long conversation with me about Tibetan nuns. She spoke passionately about their need for uplift, empowerment and change. She suggested several ideas for Tibetan nuns to shed their reliance upon monks and emerge from centuries of male domination. Principally, she outlined the importance of finding young, intelligent women with a monastic calling, establishing them in a nunnery and educating them. Once they begin to teach and make a real contribution in society, people would express their appreciation by offering whatever they need. In this way, nuns would have economic freedom, time to practise and an opportunity to benefit society. Slowly their numbers would increase, senior nuns would become examples for junior nuns, dependence upon monks would be reduced and these nuns would benefit society and participate in monastic life. This process, already long established at Hsiang-kuang Temple, is now underway at Samten Tse, Dolma Ling and a handful of other Tibetan nunneries, but it is certain that the facilities available to them on the Indian subcontinent cannot equal those in Taiwan. It is also clear that many of the differences in the two traditions' nunneries reflect the different macrocosms of the two societies.
Taiwanese nuns have already achieved success in their monastic endeavors. They are economically independent and can pursue their chosen field within monastic life. Few doors are closed to them. The fact that their numbers are increasing year by year testifies to the acceptance of the nun’s life in Taiwan, and to its ability to present a range of options for those who choose it. As the years pass, it appears that the Order of Bhikṣunīs in Taiwan will become ever more engaged with social issues and problems and will continue to fulfill the roles of teachers to the lay community and of examples to future generations of nuns.

It is hoped that this study may serve to open the way for further research about the lives and experience of Buddhist nuns, both in the contemporary world and of the past. Perhaps it may also illustrate that, while there is no place in worldly spheres for closed-minded and biased notions, so there is no place for such sentiments in Buddhism, if it to survive intact. Women in Buddhism can and should take their place at the forefront of Buddhist praxis.

Furthermore, the study highlights the benefit and value of various Buddhist traditions meeting, sharing ideas and learning from one another. Best interests are no longer served by remaining segregated, if ever they were. It is not, however, the first time that Tibetan and Chinese Buddhists have encountered one another. There has long been a melding of the two philosophical and meditation systems in such pilgrimage places of China as Wu-t’ai Shan, sacred to Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists alike. But in the region where western China meets eastern Tibet there has also been a long history of Sino-Tibetan Buddhist syncretism. I myself have observed a coming together of the two traditions, both in Chinese Buddhist monasteries and nunneries of Szechwan province.
It would be fitting to end this dissertation with a further reference to Bhikṣuṇī Lung-lien, who has established a broad curriculum encompassing both Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism for the nuns of her Bhikṣuṇī Institute and Temple in Chengtu. Her nuns perform ritual and prayer from both traditions, study both Chinese and Tibetan philosophical treatises and venerate Tibetan lineage masters, such as Padmasambhava, the eighth-century founder of Buddhism in Tibet, and the fourteenth-century Tibetan Gelukpa master, Tsong Khapa (Tsong Kha-pa), as well as patriarchs of their own. Their temple contains, in addition to a typically laid out ch’an hall, a shrine hall set up according to the tantric tradition (mi-tsung), complete with Tibetan banners, religious wall paintings, altar utensils, ritual implements and statues. The most notable bhikṣuṇī in contemporary China is putting into practice a principal tenet of Buddhism -- non-sectarianism -- and a principal tenet of the modern world -- mutual dialogue. She too is creating a new type of nun. May all these modern, well-disciplined and motivated nuns, both Tibetan and Chinese, help to steer Buddhism forward.
Four or five times
I left my cell.
I had no peace of mind,
no control over my mind.

I went to a nun
I thought I could trust.
She taught me the Dharma,
the elements of body and mind,
the nature of perception,
and earth, water, fire, and wind.

I heard what she said
and sat cross-legged
seven days full
of joy.

When, on the eighth
I stretched my feet out,
the great dark was torn apart.

- Poem from the *Therigāthā*, by Uttama, disciple of the nun Paṭācārā
### Appendix 1. Comparative Table of the Eight Chief Rules (*Gurudharma*) and their relevant Pāyantikas (see Section I.5, pp. 49-52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Chief Rules</th>
<th>Similar Pāyantikas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Even if a bhikṣuṇī has been ordained for 100 years, when she sees a bhikṣu who has recently been ordained, she should rise and welcome him, pay respect and request him to be seated.</td>
<td>No. 175 When a bhikṣuṇī sees a newly ordained bhikṣu, she should rise, pay respect to him, greet him, and ask him to sit down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bhikṣuṇīs must not scold or abuse bhikṣus.</td>
<td>No. 145 A bhikṣuṇī should not revile or abuse a bhikṣu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Official admonition of bhikṣus by bhikṣuṇīs is forbidden, whereas the official admonition of bhikṣuṇīs by bhikṣus is not forbidden.</td>
<td>No. 141 A bhikṣuṇī should go before the Bhikṣu Samgha every half-month to request instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bhikṣuṇīs should ask the Bhikṣu Samgha for teachings every half month.</td>
<td>No. 139 A bhikṣuṇī who has ordained a śīkṣamāṇa should not let a day pass before bringing her before the Bhikṣu Samgha.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A bhikṣuṇī who violates a Samghāvaśeṣa must perform the Mānatva before both Samghas for half a month.</td>
<td>No. 143 A bhikṣuṇī should not spend the summer retreat at a place where there is no bhikṣu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A woman seeking full ordination should request ordination from both Samghas, that of bhikṣus as well as of bhikṣuṇīs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Bhikṣuṇīs must not spend the rainy season retreat at a place where there are no bhikṣus.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
8. After the rainy season retreat, bhikṣuṇīs must participate in the Pravāraṇā meeting of both Saṅghas to seek for three matters, what was seen, heard and suspected.

No. 142 At the conclusion of the summer retreat, the bhikṣuṇīs must go to the Bhikṣu Saṅgha to report on the three things: what has been seen, heard and suspected.

宜蘭縣
楞伽山
福嚴禪寺三壇大戒會報名表

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佛教會会员證號碼

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<td>沙彌(尼)</td>
<td>電話：</td>
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<td>未出家前之經歷：</td>
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出家之因緣與願望：

附註：
1. 請將本表列各項，以楷書填妥，附戶籍謄本及佛教會會員證或收據影印本，限於
   85年國曆10月20日（農曆9月9日）以前，寄宜蘭縣礁溪鄉龍村路1-25號福嚴
   禪寺福嚴寺報名表收。
2. 本會收到報名表，經審查後，於戒會開始20天前，通知前來受戒。未接到通知者，請勿
   前來報到。
3. 本表須經剃度師長簽名蓋章，否則不予受理。

審查意見：

報到：
經辦人：
超建議： 元
洗衣費： 元
**REGISTRATION FORM**

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<th>Outer name</th>
<th>Lay name</th>
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<th>Master who shaved your head</th>
<th>Temple where head shaving took place</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>Novice</td>
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<th>Temple where Master took ordination precepts</th>
<th>Date of Master’s ordination</th>
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<th>Experiences before ‘leaving the home life’</th>
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<tr>
<th>Reasons and aspirations for ‘leaving the home life’</th>
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</table>
1. Please correctly fill in each item of this form in standard script. Attach a transcript of your household registration and a photocopy of Buddhist Association membership card, and send to The Ordination Committee, Fu-yen Ch'an Temple (address) by 20th October 1996 (or 9th September, lunar calendar).

2. After the Committee receives and has examined the registration form, you will be sent a notice to attend twenty days before the ordination ceremony begins. Those who do not receive notification should not come to register.

3. This form will not be accepted without the signature and seal of the Master who shaved your head.

Review Results:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Registering Official</th>
<th>Ancestor ceremony Fee</th>
<th>Laundry Fee</th>
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Office Use Only
Appendix 3. The Contested History of Bhikṣunī Ordination in Tibet

The literature of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school of Vinaya was transmitted in its entirety to Tibet in the eighth century CE, translated from Sanskrit into the Tibetan language and including the relevant sections concerning bhikṣunī ordination and precept, the Bhikṣunī Karma Vakya (dGe-slong-ma'i las kyi gshi), the Bhikṣunī Prātimokṣa (dGe-slong-ma'i so-sor thar-pa'i mdo) and the Bhikṣunī Vinayavibhaṅga (dGe-slong-ma'i 'dul-ba rnam-par 'byed-pa). However, scholars now concur that there has never been an officially recognised Bhikṣunī Samgha in Tibet. There is evidence to suggest, however, that a small number of individual bhikṣunīs were ordained and lived in Tibet from the twelfth century until at least the fifteenth century.

Ācārya Tashi Tsering and Philippa Russell state that several great lamas gave the ordination to women without the assistance of a Bhikṣunī Samgha.¹ The validity of these ordinations is called into question however, because of the absence of a full complement of bhikṣunī elders which is required to number twelve according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage, to question and bestow ordination on the candidates immediately before ordination by the Bhikṣu Samgha. However, within the Vinaya texts there are passages relating to special cases where the ordination may be given by a single Samgha, that a Bhikṣu Samgha alone may ordain women, and it appears that the lamas in question may have used such texts as these as the basis for their performance of the bhikṣunī

¹ Ācārya Tashi Tsering and Philippa Russell, "An Account of the Buddhist Ordination of Women", in Cho-Yang, No. 1, 1986, p. 28. In a personal interview with Geshe Tashi Tsering, Deputy Secretary of the Tibetan government-in-exile's Department of Religion and Culture and monk-scholar appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to investigate the issue, he stated that "It [bhikṣunī] was certainly not just a respectful title in Tibet, but good nuns definitely did go to a bhikṣu and request bhikṣunī vows. Everything would have been followed according to Vinaya and the Rules, including the correct number of ordaining bhikṣus, which would include the Lob-pon (slob-dpon) [Skt.ācārya], etc. but the only thing missing would have been the dual Samgha." (Personal interview, Dharamsala, India, March 1996)
ordination ceremony.

It is not simply a case, however, of the relevant texts stating special exceptions to the rule in the absence of an established Bhikṣuṇī Saṃgha, and bhikṣus taking this as their permission and guide to give ordinations. The procedures must follow strict Vinaya practice where rules are laid down for a number of particular circumstances.² The absence of a recognised Bhikṣuṇī Saṃgha would appear to indicate the absence of the active and correct transmission of the bhikṣuṇī precepts according to Vinaya requirement.³ Following this line of reasoning, there would also be no Tibetan bhikṣus authorised to ordain bhikṣuṇīs: they would not be part of an established ordination lineage needed to carry out valid ordinations.⁴ This absence therefore would represent more than just an exceptional circumstance but an impossibility.

In fact, it is clear from textual evidence that there were other high lamas who disagreed with the practice of utilising exceptions to the rule even though they are listed in the texts. Go Rampa Sonam Senge (sGo Ram-pa bSod-nams Seng-ge) (1429-1489) wrote in his supplement to Sakya Pandita's Dom Sum Rab Je (sDom gsum rab dbye):⁵

Some say that nowadays there are some bhikṣus in Tibet who give the bhikṣuṇī vow, but it is not right to do so because as a prerequisite for receiving ordination from a

² Although a similar situation did arise in the transmission of the Bhikṣuṇī Precepts to China, the nuns were concerned about the validity of their ordination which had been performed by a single Bhikṣu Saṃgha, and as soon as the possibility presented itself, they received re-ordination before a dual Assembly of qualified bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs.

³ In A Brief Survey of the Vinaya, Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedoroen explains that two aspects should be borne in mind when viewing Vinaya transmission: scriptural transmission and transmission of the practice, which is the more important of the two (p. 25). It is the absence of the transmission of the practice to which I am referring here.

⁴ It has been suggested by Taiwanese Bhikṣuṇī scholars recently (1997) that Tibetan bhikṣus inherently hold within their own ordination the bhikṣuṇī lineage and the permission to ordain bhikṣuṇīs.

bhikṣu, the woman must first receive the vow of celibacy and full ordination from the Bhikṣunī Samgha. No exception to this rule is stated in the Vinaya texts.\(^6\)

Taiwanese Vinaya scholars, including Bhikṣunī Heng-ching suggest, however, that Tibetan bhikṣuṣ can give the bhikṣunī precepts to Tibetan women, and, as it states in all extant Vinayas, they would merely commit a *Pāyantika* by ordaining women who have not immediately beforehand undergone a ‘basic’ bhikṣunī ordination by elder bhikṣunīṣ. The ordination would be valid, but not completely unflawed, as is already the case with most bhikṣunī ordinations in Taiwan where nuns have been ordained by a single Bhikṣu Samgha.

Almost 200 years after Go Rampa Sonam Senge’s work, the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) gives several accounts of the full ordination of women in his *Namje Serdok*, including the ordination of a woman who became known as the Gyama (rGya-ma) bhikṣunī. Her ordination in the fifteenth century is also mentioned in the biography of Pānchen Shakya Chonden (Pan-chen Sha-kya Chos-idan) by Drol Chok\(^7\) who writes of a woman called Chodup Palmo Tsortum (Chos-sgrub dPal-mo Tshul-khrims) receiving bhikṣunī ordination from a group of five masters, the minimum acceptable number, including Pānchen Shakya Chonden himself who assumed the position of chief preceptor.

There are several other incidences of the full ordination of women mentioned in Tsering and Russell’s article, in particular a very specific reference to the ordination in the thirteenth century of 4,425 bhikṣuṣ, bhikṣunīṣ, novice monks and novice nuns in Nepal, China and Minyak (in Tibet) by Chögyal Phagpa (Chos-rGyal Phags-pa). However, the strongest case they mention for the existence of a Bhikṣunī Samgha in Tibet occurs in a

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\(^{6}\) Tashi Tsering and Philippa Russell, *op. cit.* p. 29.

text called Yonten Rinpoche Gyatso (Yon-tan Rin-po-che rGya-mtsho), composed by Kashi Rigpay Senge (Bka’-bszi Rig-pa’i Seng-ge), which tells of a fourteenth century bhikṣṇī called Tashi-pel (Bkra-shis dPal) in Minyak Rabgang (Mi-nyag Rab-sgang), around whom there grew a group of bhikṣṇīs numerous enough to constitute a full complement of bhikṣṇīs capable of bestowing bhikṣṇī ordination on women. However, their own ordinations were presumably only given by a Bhikṣu Saṃgha. Any subsequent ordinations which could have been given by these bhikṣṇīs would also have been called into question if the most restrictive interpretation of exceptions to the rule mentioned above were followed.

In the eighth century, Tibet’s King Trisong Detsen (Khri-srong lDe-btsan) (790-844 CE)\(^8\) ordered that the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya was to be the only Vinaya tradition used in Tibet. It therefore remains unclear why the entire Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya was translated into Tibetan when there had been no propagation of the bhikṣṇī lineage in Tibet at the time when the bhikṣu lineage was introduced, and subsequently no possibility for there to be due to its later demise in India. The King’s order also automatically precluded bhikṣṇīs of any other Vinaya lineage extant in India or China at that time from entering Tibet to introduce a bhikṣṇī tradition. It also prevented the Indian scholar, Dipamkāra Atiśa, who belonged to the Mahāsāṃghika (dGe-'dun phal chen-po) school, from transmitting either the bhikṣu or bhikṣṇī precepts in Tibet when he went there from India in 1039 CE.

One can conclude that, in the absence of any historical evidence of bhikṣṇīs previously

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\(^8\) According to Ācārya Tashi Tsering, three of his queens received bhikṣṇī ordination, with one of them receiving the name Jangchub Tsemo. (Religious Affairs Conference, Dharamsala, November 1995, unpublished transcript).
entering Tibet in numbers large enough to give full ordination to Tibetan women, there was no Samgha of dually ordained bhikṣunīs in Tibet at any time. But why had the bhikṣunī lineage not travelled to Tibet if the relevant texts were translated into Tibetan at a time when there were still bhikṣunīs in India? No comprehensible explanation has been offered. The often-proffered argument that Tibet was too remote and inaccessible for the transmission of the bhikṣunī lineage to occur seems a little weak, as the bhikṣu lineage was transmitted under exactly the same geographically difficult circumstances, and ancient Indian texts concerning the Bhikṣunī Samgha, such as the Therīgāthā, \(^9\) amply testify to the resilience, dedication and spiritual determination of the communities of religious women of the time.

Furthermore, in our own time, many Tibetan nuns have made the difficult journey out of Tibet on foot. The Sinhalese bhikṣunīs who travelled from Sri Lanka to China by boat in the fifth century CE to take part in dual ordinations of Chinese bhikṣunīs who were concerned about the validity of their single ordination, no doubt set out knowing they would face great hardship and danger. But the importance of their mission, the bestowal of ordination upon their Chinese Buddhist sisters, overrode any concern at the risks involved in their journey.

So were women simply overlooked in the process of establishing a bhikṣu lineage in Tibet? We certainly know of individual bhikṣunīs in India at the time, such as

\(^9\) The Therīgāthā is a collection of spiritual songs composed by Buddhist women in the sixth century BCE. For the most recent English translation, see Susan Murgott's *The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therīgāthā* (Parallax Press, Berkeley, 1991).
Mandāravā of Zahor, one of the principle disciples of Padmasambhava, who herself was ordained by Śāntarakṣita in the eighth century CE. Shortly after that, he himself travelled to Tibet to establish the bhikṣu lineage. Then 20 or 300 years later (the exact date is unknown), the eminent Indian nun, Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmi (Gelongma Palmo), was ordained and "safeguarded all 364 vows [Mūlasarvāstivāda] set forth in the discipline of a Buddhist nun as she would her own eyes."11

It is possible that women were offered no choice in the matter. When such rigid orders were proclaimed by the King himself, there would not have been much the women could do once the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī lineage in India had disappeared, except undergo individual ordinations and practise as bhikṣuṇīs, if they could find a quorum of five qualified bhikṣus willing to transmit the precepts to them. There are even instances of nuns observing the precepts without actually receiving them from anybody. They simply took upon themselves the added discipline of full ordination for their lifetime. However, in the final analysis, the situation remains unresolved as there are certainly passages in the Vinaya-āgama (‘Dul-ba lung’), as mentioned above, which allow for the ordination of bhikṣuṇīs by bhikṣus alone if the circumstances are exceptional.12

10 Padmasambhava is also known as Guru Rinpoche. Originating in Odiyana in north-west India, he is venerated as the teacher who established Tantric Buddhism in Tibet in the eighth century CE. He also founded the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. Concerning the ordination of Mandāravā, see Sky Dancer (tr. Keith Dowman), Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984), p. 265.


12 In the karma-vastu of Guṇaprabha’s Condensed Vinaya Vastu, a commentary on the Vinaya-āgama, it is clearly stated that bhikṣuṇīs can be ordained by means of a Bhikṣu Saṅgha. (See Peking Tangyur, Vol. 123, p. 224, l. 1-5). This is certainly the case in Taiwan today where the majority of ordination platforms are single, even though there are many bhikṣuṇīs qualified to participate in dual ordinations. In interviews with several eminent Chinese Abbots I have been assured that such bhikṣuṇī ordinations are valid. It is unlikely that the Chinese Dharmagupta Bhikṣuṇī Vinaya would differ from the Mūlasarvāstivāda on such a point as this.
The acknowledged special circumstance of Tibet being a frontier land, seems to follow the same lines as the exception made when, after the persecution of Buddhism in Tibet by the anti-religious King Langdarma (gLang-dar-ma) in the middle of the ninth century, a bhikṣu who had only been ordained for five years instead of the required ten, transmitted the precepts to Tibetans in order to maintain the unbroken bhikṣu lineage. This is not usually permitted. Additionally, two Chinese bhiksus acted as witnesses. Despite this, nobody ever calls into question the validity of the Tibetan bhikṣu lineage. In the case of the nuns, however, the monk hierarchy did not appear to utilise the relevant clauses, the majority of them preferring instead to make the blanket statement that single ordinations are invalid under all circumstances.

Even today, some monks tend to make discriminatory remarks and gender-biased decisions about the current movement for the institution of a Bhikṣunī Samgha in Tibetan Buddhism. This reflects their deep-seated ambivalence about the existence of the Order of Bhikṣunīs. Although not preferable, it is certainly acceptable these days in Taiwan and Hong Kong, where dual ordination only occurs from time to time, for bhikṣunīs to receive ordination from the Order of Bhikṣus alone. In Korea, where dual ordination died out over 100 years ago, it has only been reinstated within the last few years.

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13 See Kathryn Ann Tsai's *Lives of the Nuns*, p. 37 for a definition of what constitutes a 'frontier land'. In her biography, the nun Hui-Kuo discusses certain factors concerning the validity of the status of Buddhist nuns in China with the central Asian missionary monk, Guṇavarman (367-431 CE). He states that a 'frontier land' must be "beyond a thousand Chinese miles or where oceans and mountains create a barrier."

14 Bhikṣu Jampa Tshedroen, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

15 Kathryn A. Tsai, "The Chinese Buddhist Monastic Order for Women" in *Women in China - Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, p. 20, fn. 71. She cites the case of a Tibetan Rinpoche who said that women should not even try to receive bhikṣunī ordination because they had to take the vows one at a time and as there were so many they would not complete the process in one lifetime. This demonstrates a lack of both knowledge and understanding of the bhikṣunī issue.
According to Taiwanese Bhikṣuṇī Heng-ching, nowhere in Dharmagupta Vinaya texts is there a stipulation that the lineage of bhikṣuṇī preceptresses must be unbroken. It is only stated that a novice nun training to be a bhikṣuṇī must study under an elder bhikṣuṇī for two years as a probationer, and then receive the first or ‘basic’ bhikṣuṇī ordination from a quorum of elder bhikṣuṇīs before being presented to the bhikṣu preceptors for the main precept transmission. If this argument is accepted, dual ordination can be restored at any time. If eminent abbots in traditions which are the custodians of the Dharmagupta lineage accept this, then what is to stop its acceptance by bhiksus of the Tibetan Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition? While disagreement continues about this issue and about whether or how to introduce bhikṣuṇī ordination into the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there can be no final statement on the matter.

Although it seems clear that there has never been any bhikṣuṇī lineage officially recognised by the male religious hierarchy in Tibet, the status of past bhikṣuṇīs ordained individually by Tibetan lamas remains unclear in the view of today’s male Tibetan Vinaya scholars. As recently as August 1998 at the international meeting in India organised by Tibetan bhiksus to discuss the rules for conferring bhikṣuṇī precepts in all three extant Vinayas, Pāli, Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda, Tibetan scholars could not reach a consensus about the validity of Shakya Chonden’s ordination of bhikṣuṇīs in Tibet in the fifteenth century.

An interesting situation arises in connection with the yoginī Yeshe Tsogyal, however. At some point she was ordained as a nun and sources vary as to what that means. Some sources maintain that the title ‘bhikṣuṇī’ was bestowed upon her as a token of respect.

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16 Bhikṣuṇī Heng-ching’s submission to the August 1998 Seminar of Mūlasarvāstivāda, Theravāda and Dharmagupta Vinaya Holders concerning the Lineage of Bhikṣuṇī Ordination held in Dharamsala.
Dowman, however, translates, "she was ordained into the stainless virtue of a bhikṣuṇī." If this is so, the fact that she lived in the eighth century would bring forward by nearly 400 years the appearance of the first bhikṣuṇī in Tibet and would raise the obvious question as to why there were no other women ordained into what must have been the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī lineage around the same time.

As Tsering and Russell say, "With such distinguished scholars involved on both sides of the argument it is difficult to come to any definite conclusion." Certainly it would be awkward to disagree with the fifth Dalai Lama who finally concludes in his book *Vinaya Acts and Rites* (*Dul-ba'i Las Chog*) that the bhikṣuṇī lineage never existed in Tibet. In a conversation, His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama has also communicated to me that there was never a bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage in Tibet. Whatever the situation was in antiquity, there have not been either individual bhikṣuṇīs or a bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage in recent centuries.

Current moves to establish the lineage touch on the topical contemporary issues of social justice, feminism and human rights and therefore raise interesting and complex questions. There has been a surge of interest in the issue of full ordination for Buddhist nuns at the present time by scholars, women and nuns themselves, and the project of introducing bhikṣuṇī ordination into traditions which lack it and of research into traditions of Buddhist nuns in general and full ordination in particular is gathering momentum and will be of ongoing concern for a long time to come.

18 Tsering and Russell, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
19 Personal interview, Theckchen Choling, Dharamsala, India, 1982.
Appendix 4. Questionnaires for Abbesses and Nuns *

First Interview with Ven. Wu-yin Fa-shih, Abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple (October 1995)

1. What caused you to feel education of nuns is so important?

2. When you first came to Hsiang-kuang Temple, how did you convince the people about your ideas and hopes?

3. In your words, what is your philosophy about the education of nuns and about the correct life of a nun?

4. Your ideas for the nuns' life are very successfully implemented here. Do you think other nuns in other temples would follow your plan?

5. How does the standard of the nuns' life in Taiwan compare with that in traditional mainland China in the past, and what are the major differences?

6. Can you talk a little about your view that nuns should be self-sufficient and independent, and know all the monastic procedures, free of monk or lay control?

7. Please explain how the nuns at Hsiang-kuang Temple practise the spirit of the precepts in a way that is suitable for modern conditions.

8. Please describe the history and origins of Hsiang-kuang Temple? How did it come from being Taoist to being Buddhist?

9. Please talk about the first abbess of Hsiang-kuang Temple. How did she take up this position?
10. What were her special contributions to Hsiang-kuang Temple's development and progress?

11. How did you come to be the second abbess?

12. What are your aims for Hsiang-kuang Temple?

Second Interview with Ven. Wu-yin Fa-shih (March 9, 1997)

1. Did you have a Buddhist childhood?

2. From what age did you wish to be a nun?

3. Please tell of any incidents and happenings in your childhood and youth which propelled your mind to want to be a nun?

4. Did you read books about nuns or meet Buddhist nuns when you were a child?

5. Please describe your Buddhist education and achievements.

6. Who is your Master?

7. Can you describe some of the important words of advice he/she gave you?

8. What factors and qualities make a good abbess?

9. Can you see changes in the attitudes of the women who become nuns these days compared to the time when you were ordained?

Interviews with Khandro Rinpoche (April 27 and May 4 1996)

1. What do you think about the current situation of the contemporary Tibetan nuns'
tradition? How should it change? Is there an upward trend apparent?

2. Why were nuns never educated as monks were in the past?

3. I have interviewed lay Tibetans who say that nuns and monks have the same opportunities. Is this true?

4. You had a broad secular and religious education. Do you think that all nuns should have such an opportunity?

5. How has your own formative and educational background influenced your ideas and plans for nuns’ education?

6. What is your philosophy on education for nuns?

7. What should the nuns’ life include and consist of?

8. What should be included in religious training for Tibetan nuns?

9. Do you think that the bhikṣuṇī ordination will improve the nuns’ position and possibilities? What prevented its existence in Tibet? What is your theory about the bhikṣuṇī lineage in Tibet?

10. Please describe your view of Vinaya.

11. Please describe the hierarchy and routine at Samten Tse.

12. Describe Samten Tse’s rules and discipline.


14. What does the future hold for the Tibetan nuns’ tradition?
15. What is the responsibility of a nun within Tibetan society as a whole? Should Tibetan nuns be active in society?

16. Who will Samten Tse nuns teach when they are qualified?

**Formal Interview with Chinese bhikṣuṇīs**

1. What is your age?

2. When did you become: a novice? a bhikṣuṇī?

3. What is your level of education?

4. What did you do before you became a nun?

5. What is your family background? What are your parents’ occupations? Do you have a Buddhist background?

6. Why did you become a nun?

7. Do you think being fully ordained as a bhikṣuṇī is important? Why?

8. What have you achieved since becoming a nun?

9. If you could not be a nun, because of circumstances, what would you choose?

10. What do you find most difficult about being a nun?

11. Do you feel you spend enough time on personal spiritual practice and religious activities?

12. What are your own thoughts about life as a nun, and its benefits?
13. What are your ambitions or goals?

**Formal Interview with Tibetan nuns**

1. What is your age?

2. When did you become a novice nun? (or bhikṣuṇī)

3. What is your family background? Parents’ occupation?

4. Describe your education.

5. Why did you become a nun?

6. What is your main goal as a nun?

7. If you could not be a nun, what would you want to be?

8. What do you find most difficult about your life as a nun?

9. Do you think it is important for Tibetan nuns to have the chance to receive ordination as a bhikṣuṇī?

10. What do you think the purpose of the nuns’ life is?

11. What are the most important things Tibetan nuns should do?

12. What do you think would improve the general situation for Tibetan nuns?

13. Describe the present relationship between Tibetan nuns and monks; between Tibetan nuns and lay people.

* The methodology I used to seek answers to these questions is discussed in Section I.3 (Methodology).
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Hui-chü Ssu  慧居寺
Hui-kuo, Bhiksüpi  慧果
hung ch'en  紅塵
hung-hu  弘護
i ho t'ung yüeh  意和同悅
i-po-liao  衣鉢寮
jan-hsiang  燃香
jen-wen-hsüeh  人文學
k'ai chih ch'ih fan  開治持犯
k'ai-t'ang ho-shang  開堂和尚
Kao seng chuan  高僧傳
k'o-t'ang  客堂
k'ou ho wu cheng  口和無靜
k'u-fang  庫房
k'u-fang-tsu  庫房組
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| kuei-i san pao | 鎮依三寶 | 鎮依三寶 |
| kuei-yüeh | 規約 | 規約 |
| kung-ch’eng-tsu | 工程組 | 工程組 |
| kuo-t’ang | 過堂 | 過堂 |
| Leng-yen chou | 楞嚴咒 | 楞嚴咒 |
| li-ch’an i | 禮懴衣 | 禮懴衣 |
| li ho t’ung chün | 利和同均 | 利和同均 |
| Li Yü-chen | 李玉珍 | 李玉珍 |
| lin-chai i | 臨齋儀 | 臨齋儀 |
| Lin-chi | 臨濟 | 臨濟 |
| liu chien seng te i-i | 六建僧的意義 | 六建僧的意義 |
| lü | 律 | 律 |
| lü-i te yang | 律儀德養 | 律儀德養 |
| Lung-ch’ang Ssu | 隆昌寺 | 隆昌寺 |
Lung-lien, Bhikṣuṇī
luo-han kua
Mi-le Fo
mi-tsung
Ming-chia Fa-shih
Mo-ho-seng-ch’i
mu k’ou-chung chieh
mu shih k’o sung
mu-yü
Nan-lin Ssu
ni-ku
nien-fo tao-ch’ang
Nung-ch’an Ssu
pa ching fa
pa-shih-pa fo
Pai-chang huai hai
Pai-sheng Fa-shih
pai-yüan
Pao-kuang Ssu
Pao-hsien, Bhikṣuṇī
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pen yüan

P‘i-ni jih yung
pi-ch’iu
pi-ch’iu-ni

Pi-ch’iu-ni chuan
pi-kuan

p‘u-sa chieh
san kuei-i

San t’an ta chieh fo shih
(wen ta ch’ang sung)
chien tsė

San-tsang fo-hsüeh-yüan
Saṅghavarman
Seng-chien, Bhikṣu
Seng-kuo, Bhikṣu

seng-shih

sha-mi lü-i

sha-mi-ni

shang-kung

shen ho kung chu

Sheng-yen Fa-shih

shih-ch’a-mo-na

shih chung li-i

shih-loo

shih ts’un wu kuan

shou-chieh

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四分比丘尼戒本

四分比丘尼羯磨法

四板

随方毘尼

大磐

大鍾

大醒法师

大鼓

大寮

大殿

大殿组

大坐

太虚

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道源法师

得戒和尚
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tsu-hsien
tsun-cheng
tsung-shih chih-tu
tu-tieh	t’ung-chieh-lu

鐵薩羅
地藏
天台
定慧學苑
豆醬
菜姑
藏經樓
早粥
早課
早餐
作持
作務
組長
祖先
尊證
宗史制度
度牒
同戒錄
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Yü-chia tsung 瑜伽宗
Yü shan yen 玉山岩
yüan-chang 院長
Yüan-kuang fo-hstieh 圆光佛學研究所
yen-chiu-so
Yung-cheng, Ch’ing Emperor 雍正
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<td>rTson-pa zhi-bar bya-ba'i chos</td>
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<td>mthang-gos (sham-thabs)</td>
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<td>sky-goer</td>
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<td>mkha-'gro-ma</td>
<td>ten-precept mother</td>
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<td>gSo-sbyong</td>
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<td>IHag-ma</td>
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<td>dGe-slob-ma</td>
<td>probationer</td>
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<td>śīla</td>
<td>tshul-khrims</td>
<td>morality, principles</td>
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<td>preceptress in the rules</td>
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<td>dGe-tshul</td>
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<td>upper robe</td>
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<td>lung gShi</td>
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Viniya Piṣṭaka
‘Dul-ba’i sde-snod
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Viniya-āgamas
‘Dul-ba’i lung-sde

Viniya-vibhaṅga
‘Dul-ba rnam-par byed-pa


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