

# Buddhist Nuns in Taiwan and Sri Lanka

A critique of the feminist perspective

Wei-Yi Cheng

# BUDDHIST NUNS IN TAIWAN AND SRI LANKA

This book is a comparative study of Buddhist nuns in contemporary Taiwan and Sri Lanka. The author explores the postcolonial background and its influence on the contemporary situation, as well as surveying the main historical, economic, social and other factors bearing upon the position of nuns in society. Based on original research, in which nuns were questioned about their perspective, various controversial issues concerning the status of women in Buddhism are exposed. These include allegedly misogynist teachings relating to women's inferior karma, that they cannot become Buddhas, and that nuns have to follow additional rules which monks do not. This book makes an important contribution to the study of women in Buddhism by focusing both on nuns from both of the main wings of Buddhism (Theravāda and Mahayana) and from different Asian countries.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

In the sixth year of Yuanjia, a foreign ship owner named Nanti brought a group of *bhikkhunī* from Lion Kingdom. The nuns lodged at Jingfu Temple at the capital of Song. Later, they asked [Chinese] nun Sengguo: ‘Has any foreign nun come to your country?’ She answered no. They again asked, ‘How could, then, [Chinese] nuns obtain higher ordination from two sections of sangha?’ Sengguo answered: ‘We obtained higher ordination from the *bhikkhu* sangha. Those who are advanced [in knowledge and/or spiritual practice] might give ordination, for it is to be a skillful means to rouse respect in the minds of people. Such are the cases of Mahāpajāptī gaining ordination from her acceptance of the Eight Special Rules and the five hundred Sākya women obtaining ordination with Mahāpajāptī as their preceptor. We follow their examples.’ Although Sengguo answered as such, she still had doubts. She later consulted [Kashmir monk] Gunavarman who gave the same explanation. Sengguo consulted him again on whether it was permissible to obtain higher ordination for a second time. Gunavarman answered that since *sīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā* must be developed from the lower stage to the higher stage, it is helpful to obtain a second higher ordination. In the tenth year of Yuanjia, ship owner Nanti brought another eleven nuns, including nun Tiesaluo, from Lion Kingdom. The nuns from Lion Kingdom who had arrived earlier had learnt the language of Song. Higher ordination was requested and the ordination platform was erected at Nanlin Temple. More than three hundred [Chinese] nuns obtained a second higher ordination in the following year.

‘Guangling Sengguo ni zhuan’, *Biqiuni zhuan* (T50)  
(‘Biography of nun Sengguo of Guangling’,  
*Biographies of Bhikkhunī*)<sup>1</sup>

The sixth year of Yuanjia is said to be 429 C.E. and Lion Kingdom a Sri Lankan kingdom (see H. Goonatilake, 1988: 40–46). The Sri Lankan

*bhikkhuni* mentioned in the biography bravely faced the danger of the sea and the long journey and traveled to China to give *bhikkhuni* ordination. These Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* are the beginning of the story for this research, for this research is a comparative study of Buddhist nuns in contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan. As will be shown in Chapter 2, had these Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* never traveled to China to transmit *bhikkhuni* ordination, this research would have never taken place, for neither the *bhikkhuni* lineages in Taiwan nor even that in Sri Lanka would be in existence today.

This research arises from a sense of alienation that I often feel towards Western feminist discourse on Buddhism. Although many Western feminist works are inspiration to me, from time to time, I find that Western feminist works do not necessarily speak to my experience as an Asian Buddhist woman. In order to provide a bridge between feminist agitation and the reality of Buddhist women, I set the purpose of this research as to explore factors that affect the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Even though I wish to study Buddhist women in general, a research as such might be too broad in scope. Thus, I focus on the study of Buddhist nuns only. To do so, I focus on a comparative study of Buddhist nuns in contemporary Sri Lanka and contemporary Taiwan. Hopefully, through a comparison, those factors might become more apparent than by studying a single tradition in isolation.

The choice of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese nuns for the research was for both academic and personal reasons. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, one of the key figures in the Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) movement, praises the Buddhist nuns' order in Taiwan as 'the success story' (1999a: 19), because in many ways the Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order seems to embody prosperity and high achievement. Thus, a comparison between the Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order and another Buddhist nuns' order might reveal factors that influence the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Adding to the fact that I am Taiwanese and there is no language barrier to worry about, the choice of the Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order as one of the comparison subjects seems natural. Having chosen the Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order as one of the research subjects, the next question was which other Buddhist nuns' order should be chosen for the comparison. As recorded in Karma Lekshe Tsomo's account, the Buddhist nuns' order in Sri Lanka has been going through great changes in recent years as the result of the feminist struggle to reestablish the *bhikkhuni* order in the country (1999a: 11–13). Therefore a study of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka might not only bear witness to the unfolding changes but also reveal elements that Buddhist nuns themselves deem important to keep, or negative or neutral enough to abandon, during the process of reestablishing the *bhikkhuni* order. The historical link between Buddhist nuns' orders in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, as described earlier, certainly contributed to my choice of Sri Lankan nuns for the study. But this choice also had a personal dimension. On a previous pilgrimage trip to Sri Lanka some years ago, I fell in love with the beauty of

the island and wished to learn more about Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Hence, for both academic and personal reasons, I chose Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns for the comparative study.

The inspiration for this research might be literally traced back to two books: *Buddhism After Patriarchy: a feminist history, analysis, and reconstruction of Buddhism* by Rita Gross (1993) and *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: realizations* edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo (1999a). Both books will be discussed later in this chapter. I will first discuss the Western ‘discovery’ of Buddhism, even though Buddhism had existed prior to the Western ‘discovery’, because it forms an important backbone to the appearances of previous works. Then I will move on to the discussion of my research aims. For this research is inspired by Western feminist critiques on Buddhism and yet, this research is also a rethinking about Western feminism, reflecting what I see as its shortcomings when confronted with the reality of Buddhist women. The term ‘Western feminism’ is a generalized term and probably should be avoided because it fails to give an adequate picture of the complexity of Western society (e.g. variances in class, race, nations, subculture, sexual orientation, etc.). Additionally, since I am only able to access English-language materials, the term ‘Western feminism’ in this chapter actually refers to feminist literatures written in English and mostly published in the UK or USA, rather than a broader range of literatures published in the Western world. However, because of the general introductory scope of this chapter, I will continue to use generalized terms such as ‘Western Buddhism’ or ‘Western feminism’. In the subsequent chapters, I will specify, for example, which Western feminist writer I refer to in order to avoid further generalization.

### **Western discovery of Buddhism**

Western study of Buddhism largely originated in Orientalism, and to some extent, Western academic/feminist study of Buddhism is still patterned by its Orientalist origins. In order to understand the shortcomings in the Western feminist critique of Buddhism, it is necessary to understand the patterns of Western study of Buddhism, because many of the shortcomings have their roots in Orientalism.

It might be argued that a more comprehensive learning of Buddhism by the Europeans, who were situated geographically distant from Buddhist Asia, required better communication and transportation between the two continents. Thus, it is understandable that European learning of Buddhism intensified with European expansion of trade, military power and colonialism of the modern time, as traveling and communication between Europe and Asia became frequent. European expansion also gave rise to and coincided with Orientalism. According to Said, the purpose or content of Orientalist discourse is to represent the imbalance of power between

imperialist Europe and Asia, showing the superiority of the West rather than discussing knowledge about the East (1978: 12).

Although the focus of Said's study is the Middle East rather than Eastern Asia or Southeast Asia where Buddhism prevails, one can still find examples of Orientalist discourse of Buddhism serving agendas other than genuine learning. This is perhaps best exemplified in, and in turn reflects, the upheaval of the Christian missionaries' learning of Buddhism, in the way that their inquiry about Buddhism is often for the purpose of countering Buddhist teachings and spreading Christianity rather than a pursuit of cross-cultural understandings (see, for example, Batchelor 1994: 161–195; Fields 1981: 20–25). The nineteenth-century European discourse of Buddhism also saw the agenda of constructing the idea of European superiority (Almond 1988: 33–53).

However, Said's critique on Orientalism has been criticized. For instance, Lopez argues that while the Islamic world 'occupied the space immediately beyond the imaginary border between west and east' and thus appears threatening to the West, the Buddhist world was 'at the ends of the earth' and 'representing no such threat' (1995: 11). Hence, the purpose of Orientalist discourse on Buddhism is not necessarily identical to the Orientalist discourse on the Islamic world, as described in Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In addition, European hegemony over Asia may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for Orientalism. That is, according to Clarke, Orientalism was generated by conditions in Europe since the Renaissance, for global expansion, and encounters with non-Judaic-Christian traditions and technological development created an intellectual and spiritual void in Europe that motivated Europeans to seek alternative worldviews to fill this intellectual and spiritual void (1997: 19–34). As such, Western discourse on Buddhism sometimes idealizes and romanticizes Buddhism. One example of this is the tendency in the West to apply Buddhism in psychotherapy and the study of psychology. One may see such a tendency as an idealization and/or romanticization of Buddhism, for identifying Buddhism with psychotherapy/psychology involves a process of selecting Buddhist doctrines and neglecting the ways in which Buddhist teachings are actually lived by the adherents. Idealization/romanticization or not, the Western association of Buddhism with psychotherapy/psychology does not necessary imply an attempt to dominate the Orient Other, since such an association reflects a self-criticism on the Western part (Clarke 1997: 145–164).

Furthermore, in the religious realm, Said's critique on Orientalism may simplify the distinction between the Western learning of religion as a system of knowledge and the Western learning of the religion as religious belief and practice. For example, echoing Said's view on Orientalism, Almond states, 'Through the West's progressive possession of the texts of Buddhism, it becomes, so to say, materially owned by the West; and by virtue of this ownership, ideologically controlled by it' (1988: 24). The problem with

Almond's statement is that throughout history, Buddhism as a religion has always been in constant transformation in order to suit the conditions and needs of the adherents of different times and regions. Western Buddhists are not the first group who attempt to 'ideologically control' Buddhism. Buddhism in China, for example, has changed beyond recognition since its arrival in China during the first century C.E. Chinese Buddhists, too, have shown eagerness to possess Buddhist texts; several of them (e.g. Xuanzang of the seventh century, Yijing of the eighth century) even took up the challenge of journeying to India to obtain Buddhist texts.<sup>2</sup> A similar process of transformation has been taking place in the West. In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, Buddhism may no longer be an object 'out there', as an imaginative Other waiting to be explored during the Victorian period (see Almond 1988: 12–14). Contributors to *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia* (Prebish and Baumann 2002) reveal that Buddhism has become a religious belief and practice embedded in the lives of many Westerners. Given the fact that Western Buddhists face different conditions and needs from their Asian counterparts, the Western transformation of Buddhism is understandable and necessary. Thus, to view any Western transformation of Buddhism as an attempt to dominate the Orient Other runs the risk of simplifying the situation of Buddhism as a form of religion observed by Westerners.

### *Transformation*

One of the goals of this research is to recognize the fact that Asian Buddhism has always undergone transformation, for the reorganization of transformation helps to avoid an East/West and Us/Other binary axis that can still be found in the study of Buddhism. For example, as a Buddhist woman, I find Rita Gross's *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (1993) inspiring. As an Asian Buddhist woman, however, the occasional East/West, Us/Other binary rhetoric in the book alienates me. To her credit, in her later book, *Feminism and Religion* (1996), Gross calls for attention to cross-cultural study of religion. And in her more recent work, Gross stresses the importance of cross-cultural understanding (2004: 23).

But in *Buddhism After Patriarchy*, there seems to be a strong East/West, Us/Other binary rhetoric. The assumption that only Western Buddhists are capable or aware of the need for feminist transformation of Buddhism (e.g. Gross 1993: 25, 218–219) echoes Orientalist rhetoric that subjugates Asian Buddhists. Even non-Asian Buddhists may experience this as a form of US-imperialism. A (white) British feminist Buddhist friend once exclaimed to me, 'I don't feel related to *Buddhism After Patriarchy*; it's too American-centered'. Buddhism is not homogenous, not even in the English-speaking West. The recognition of transformation in Sri Lankan and Taiwanese Buddhism shows the multifarious nature of Buddhism, for it reveals that just as Western Buddhism struggles to adapt to the cultural environment in the



West, Buddhism in Asia also constantly transforms itself in order to meet the new social and cultural conditions.

Furthermore, the recognition of transformation is a reminder that Buddhist women do not live in a *purely* religious context. The belief and practices of Buddhist women are also constantly transforming in order to face constantly changing social, economic and political conditions. The recognition of this transformation helps to see the ways in which Buddhist women adapt/manage to resist the challenges presented by social changes. For instance, on observing women in a rural Sri Lankan village, Risseuw realizes the difficulty of confronting and challenging the privileged, and she comes to appreciate the small actions of resistance that are commonly deployed by rural women but not recognized by most educated, privileged feminists (1988). 'One is taught to become a strategist rather than a struggler', says Risseuw (1988: 287). In other words, feminist discourse must be cautious of the differences among women. After all, Buddhist women do not exist simply as women; they are also embodied with class, racial, national and other identities. Feminist scholars, usually coming from a more privileged background, might overlook the resistance undertaken by women of different backgrounds in the struggle against various types of oppression, including oppressions other than patriarchy. As will be shown in Chapter 2, the lives of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese Buddhist nuns are closely linked with the political, social and economic conditions on the islands. This brings us to the next topic: the demarginalization of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan.

### *Demarginalization*

As Buddhism may be transformed by social, economic and political conditions, the beliefs and practices of Buddhist women might also be transformed accordingly. The aim of demarginalization of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan is to shift the attention from the empirical assumptions about 'sisterhood' in some Western feminist critiques to the complicated reality of Buddhist women across different contexts.

Applying Sharma's suggestion that the position of women in religion might be viewed as a political variable (2000: 174), any emphasis on transformation is intended to take into account the distribution of power not only between men and women, but also across imperial and other power boundaries that erect 'forms of conceptual enclosure and social regulation' (Ashcroft 2001: 182). Imperial boundaries, set by the dominant culture, shape our understanding of 'how things are' (Ashcroft 2001: 182). Having the power of scholarly language, feminist scholars are in a privileged position to speak out on issues. Thus, feminist discourse on religion may unintentionally set up imperial boundaries that homogenize differences among women and/or subjugate women of different backgrounds, by assuming that all women's interests are identical. Donaldson and Kwok observe that

feminist study of religion is sometimes ‘replicating the colonial gaze in the name of serving a feminist agenda’ (2002: 3). This is well illustrated in Bulbeck’s critique of Western feminist study of other cultures. According to Bulbeck, Western feminism’s theoretical and empirical analyses of other cultures are often based on Western values, and neglect the variation of values within and among different cultures (1998). By so doing, women in other cultures might be silenced and their interests distorted (see Kwok 2002, for example). To be fair, Western feminists are probably not racist or imperialist or intentionally/consciously setting out with the agenda of dominating other cultures. They, like most people, simply see the world through their understanding of values, which are shaped by the cultures in which they grew up. This is a mistake that could be easily made by anyone. Hence, it is important to transcend the limitation of imperial boundaries in order to achieve a fair distribution of power, not only between men and women but also among women. In other words, if the project is about Buddhist women in Asia, then it is necessary to demarginalize Asian Buddhist women.

Demarginalization is not only important in theoretical discourse but also important in mundane practices. The negative consequence of failing to notice the cross-cultural differences is well demonstrated in Boserup’s famous study, *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970). In it, Boserup shows how imposing one’s own values in development projects in other countries and marginalizing the local values and cultures in these projects can bring disastrous consequences upon the very people and societies that these projects aimed to help (1970). Thus, for reasons to be explained below, the demarginalization of Asian Buddhist women in the feminist discourse of Buddhism is the agenda and prerequisite in this research.

As mentioned earlier, one of the sources of inspiration for this research is *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1996). This book contains articles generated by Sakyadhita, an International Association of Buddhist Women. This movement was started in 1987 by Ayya Khema, Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh and Karma Lekshe Tsomo to provide a special meeting of Buddhist and feminist ideas. The focuses of Sakyadhita are: (1) to create a network of communications among Buddhist women of the world, (2) to educate women as teachers of Buddhism, (3) to conduct research on women and Buddhism, and (4) to work for the establishment of the *Bhikṣuṇī Sangha* (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1996: 2). Subsequent Sakyadhita conferences took place in Bangkok in 1991, Colombo 1993, Ladakh (India), 1995, Cambodia 1997, Lumbini (Nepal) 2000, Taipei 2002, and Seoul 2004. The various issues raised in Sakyadhita literature intrigued me. They opened my eyes to the stories of Buddhist women elsewhere. Sakyadhita literature, combined with Rita Gross’s *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (1993), motivated me to learn more about women in Buddhism. As an Asian Buddhist woman, I sometimes feel alienated by Western feminist discourse on Buddhism, including parts of *Buddhism After Patriarchy* and some Sakyadhita literature,

Table 1 Profiles of Sri Lanka and Taiwan (2002)

	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>
Total population (thousands)	19,007	22,521
Population density (per square km)	303	622.3
Poverty headcount ratio (%)	22.7	0.76
Labor force participation rate, both sexes (%)	50.3	57.34
Labor force participation rate, female (%)	33.6	46.59
Average household expenditure on food (%)	44.5*	24.1
Email/internet user	4 (per 1000 people)**	37%***

Sources: For Sri Lanka: *Sri Lanka Statistical Data Sheet 2004*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/misc/ds2004.pdf>, accessed 21 May 2005.

For Taiwan: *Statistical Yearbook*, Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C.: <http://eng.dgbas.gov.tw/lp.asp?CtNode=2351&CtUnit=1072&BaseDSD=36>, accessed 21 May 2005.

\* *Household Income And Expenditure Survey 2002*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka: [http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/HIES2002\\_DistrictLevel.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/HIES2002_DistrictLevel.pdf), accessed 21 May 2005.

\*\* *Poverty Statistics/Indicators For Sri Lanka*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/PovertyStatistics.pdf>, accessed 23 May 2005.

\*\*\* *Taiwan Yearbook 2004*, Government Information Office: <http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5-gp/yearbook/P213.htm#6>, accessed 23 May 2005.

even though they are still an inspiration to me. Therefore, I decided to conduct research based on issues raised by the Sakyadhita movement, to investigate whether issues that deeply concern Western feminists actually matter to Buddhist women in Asia. One of these issues is the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Since a study on Sri Lankan and Taiwanese Buddhist women in general would have been too broad in scope, I narrowed the research topic by focusing on Buddhist nuns. I hope to present their views through interviews and surveys with them, in order to demarginalize their position in the current Western feminist discourse on Buddhism. The fieldwork findings will be detailed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Since the belief and practices of Buddhist women are interrelated with the political, social and economic conditions that they find themselves in, it will be necessary to pay attention to these conditions in Sri Lanka and Taiwan. A brief glance at the profiles of Sri Lanka and Taiwan (Table 1) reveals that the two differ in many ways. Unfortunately, the scope of this research prevents me from discussing the effects of these different social and economic elements in detail, although to some extent, I have taken these elements into consideration in this work.

### The discovery of Buddhist women

Though I am an Asian woman, I am basing the issues in my research on the Western study of Buddhism. This research is thus a product of the long

discovery of Buddhist women in Western academia. Compared with records of Buddhist men, records of Buddhist women seem to be few. It is true in Asian literature, as well as in Western literature. The interest in the study of Buddhism in the West may have grown considerably during the nineteenth century (Clarke 1997: 71–74), but the early voices of feminist study of Buddhism were waylaid by male agenda (Walters 1994: 359–364). After Mabel Bode<sup>3</sup> and Caroline A. Foley<sup>4</sup> (later known by her married name C.A.F. Rhys Davids) delivered their papers at the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists (1892), the next notable Western study on women in Buddhism emerged as late as 1930, with I.B. Horner's *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: Laywomen and Almswomen*. I.B. Horner's survey of women in Pāli literature is so thorough that *Women Under Primitive Buddhism* remains a significant introductory book to women in Buddhism till this day. The marginalization of women's interests in the religious/academic discourse is demonstrated by the fact that in spite of their enormous contribution to Buddhist study, Caroline A. Foley and I.B. Horner (probably Mabel Bode as well, though Ursula King does not provide a case study on her) are unappreciated and almost entirely forgotten by the male-dominated academia (King 1995b).

It seems that initially, Western discovery of Buddhist women focuses largely on the texts, on the history of women and the study of feminine images and symbols within Buddhist texts. Examples are Joanna Macy's *Perfection of Wisdom: Mother of all Buddhas* (1978) and Diana Paul's *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition* (1979). As the interest in Buddhism as a religious practice grows in the West, feminist discourse on Buddhism gradually comes to notice Western women's experience with Buddhism and their interpretation of Buddhism. Sandy Boucher's *Turning the Wheel: American Women Creating the New Buddhism* (1988) is a good example. In this book, stories of American Buddhist women teachers are told. The word 'creating' in the title is interesting, for it indicates that Western Buddhist women have become active agents in shaping their Buddhist belief and practices. *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (1993) and *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (1996) further call for feminist transformation of Buddhism. In other words, from the search for women's inclusion in textual and historical discourse, Western discovery of Buddhist women has moved to the focus on women's experience and women's active engagement with/in the religion.

Indeed, the various studies of women in Buddhism reflect the multiple developments of feminist study of religion, which is well summarized by Ursula King (1995a). In this chapter I have shown that this research aims to recognize the transformation in Buddhism and to demarginalize Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan.

Admittedly, I am not the first Asian woman to question the applicability of Western feminism in a non-Western context. Many Asian women have

raised challenges against Western feminism, such as Ang Ien (1995), Homi Bhabha (1983), and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988). More specifically, in the area of religious studies there are Chen Mei-Hwa (1995), Nilima Chitgopekar (2002), and Kwok Pui-lan (2002). The discontent of Asian women with Western feminist discourse is well exemplified in Kawahashi Noriko's statement:

Unfortunately, however, the attempts by women in Japan today to remake Buddhism from a new feminist perspective are little known, if at all, in Europe and America. A growing number of women in recent years, largely in America, have looked to Buddhism for a spirituality to replace Judaism and Christianity. Some of them have given up on Asian Buddhism, finding it spoiled by gender discrimination, and made the colonialist maneuver of proclaiming Western society to be the driving force for a new Buddhism.

(2003: 310)

By shifting attention to the reality of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, I hope that my research will contribute to the growing literatures that seek a better understanding of the reality of women in Asia, and provide a bridge between the Western feminist discourse and the reality of Asian Buddhist women.

## Chapter 2

# BUDDHIST WOMEN IN SRI LANKA AND TAIWAN

In order to have a better understanding of how the nuns in this research arrive at their religious beliefs and practices, this chapter will give a brief introduction about Buddhist nuns' orders in Sri Lanka and Taiwan.

### **Buddhist women in Sri Lanka**

Buddhism has a long history in Sri Lanka. According to a Sri Lankan chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, Buddhism was transmitted to Sri Lanka around the third century B.C.E. by monk Mahinda, son of Emperor Asoka of India. He successfully converted the Sri Lankan king Devānampiyatissa to Buddhism. And after hearing his sermon, a large number of Sri Lankan women, said to be 'five hundred maidens and five hundred women of the royal harem' (English translation of the *Mahāvamsa*, by Geiger 1912: 122) and led by the king's consort Anulā, expressed the wish to join Buddhist monastic order. In order to have the sufficient number of *bhikkhunī* preceptors required for women's higher ordination, Mahinda sent for his sister, Sanghamittā, to come to Sri Lanka. While waiting, Anulā and other women donned the yellow robe, observed ten precepts and lived in seclusion. After six months of waiting, Sanghamittā and other eleven *bhikkhunī* arrived, and upon their arrival, they immediately ordained Anulā and other women. The *bhikkhunī* order was thus established in Sri Lanka (Bartholomeusz 1994: 17–19; Dewaraja 1999: 74; Devendra 1987: 58–59). Therefore, based on the information from the *Mahāvamsa*, it seems that Sanghamittā and the *bhikkhunī* order under her were well-respected, well-supported and enjoyed royal patronage. In some aspects, the text explicitly describes the treatment of her as being on a par with that of monk Mahinda. This reflects the common feature of gender pairing in Theravāda Buddhism, which emphasizes the equal but discrete spiritual paths for men and women and is seen by Walters as an alternative to androgyny (1994). The affluence of early Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns is a sharp contrast to the destitution and marginalization endured by their counterparts in the late twentieth century as described in Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra (1987).

Sanghamittā remains an important figure in Sri Lankan Buddhism till this day, not only because she is credited for transmitting the *bhikkhunī* order, but also because she brought a branch of the sacred Bōdhi tree, under which the Buddha is said to have gained enlightenment, to Sri Lanka. The sacred Bōdhi tree still flourishes in the ancient city of Anurādhapura, and a shrine of Sanghamittā was erected near the site of the sacred Bōdhi tree. The Bōdhi tree is central to the Sri Lankan Buddhist landscape – more than in any other Buddhist tradition. Almost all Sri Lankan Buddhist temples have a descendant of the Bōdhi tree in their temple grounds. And in nearly all the Buddhist nunneries I visited in Sri Lanka, there was a statue of Sanghamittā. According to my informants, once every year, the statue of Sanghamittā would be paraded around the village by both male and female villagers. Bartholomeusz states that the Sanghamittā festival was resumed by English-speaking Buddhists in 1923. Though Bartholomeusz does not mention witnessing any Sanghamittā festival, she quotes a record of the 1923 celebration: ‘the celebration included a large Buddha *pūjā*,<sup>1</sup> a parade of Buddhist laity, monks, tom-tom beating and yellow flags, which symbolized Sanghamittā’s clerical affiliation’ (1994: 110). The Sanghamittā festival I witnessed was slightly different, for while the parade dramatized the arrival of Sanghamittā and was followed by a large number of nuns and laity, *bhikkhu* participated only in the *Bōdhi pūjā* that was conducted after the parade but not in the parade itself.

Another chronicle that contains significant records of *bhikkhunī* in ancient Sri Lanka is the *Dīpavaṃsa*, written around the fourth century. In the *Dīpavaṃsa*, a total of seventy-two *bhikkhunī* are mentioned by name and thousands by numbers, of which many are described as well-versed in Dharma and Vinaya, spiritually advanced and renowned preachers (Devendra 1987: 68–72). Because of the vivid records of *bhikkhunīs*’ activities and achievements in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, some even speculate that the *Dīpavaṃsa* was actually written by nuns (Bartholomeusz 1994: 18; Dewaraja 1999: 75). More importantly, there is archeological evidence to suggest a flourishing *bhikkhunī* order up to the tenth century (Devendra 1987: 73–75). It seems that contrary to the time of Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra’s (1987) fieldwork in the late 1980s, in which they find Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns in a desolate condition, Buddhist nuns once played an active role in the social and religious realms of ancient Sri Lanka.

The demise of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order occurred around the tenth century, when a series of internal political conflicts, foreign invasions and famine devastated the Buddhist establishments (Wijayasundara 1999: 80). Both the *bhikkhu* and the *bhikkhunī* orders died out in Sri Lanka during this period. Although in the late eleventh century, King Vijayabāhu restored the *bhikkhu* sangha by reintroducing the lineage from Burma, history is silent about any attempt to reintroduce the *bhikkhunī* sangha (Bartholomeusz 1994: 21; Wijayasundara 1999: 81). Since both literary and epigraphic evidence



suggests that women, both lay and monastic, played an active and influential role in early Buddhism (Skilling 2001), why and how female interests in monasticism was neglected by King Vijayabāhu, and/or by literary/historical record, remains to be investigated. It was not until the late nineteenth century that promoting the restoration of Buddhist nuns' orders resurged again.

The late nineteenth century seems to be an important period for Sri Lankan Buddhism. According to Gombrich and Obeyesekere, the anti-colonial, nationalist movement in Sri Lanka during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century profoundly transformed Buddhism in Sri Lanka (1988). Because of European colonial rule since the late sixteenth century (the British reunited the whole island in 1815), Buddhism in Sri Lanka was severely damaged, and though indifferent to or incomprehensive of Christian missionaries' activities and intention at first, Sri Lankan Buddhists eventually came to react aggressively against the constant attacks on their religion from Christian missionaries (Malalgoda 1976: 109–230; 1972/3). As the anti-colonial, nationalist movement gained momentum in the late nineteenth century, attention was shifted to evoke pride in Sri Lanka's native culture, tradition and religion. Under the influence of prominent figures such as *bhikkhu* Mohottivatte Gunānanda, Colonel H.S. Olcott, and Anagārika Dharmapāla, Buddhism in Sri Lanka gradually transformed into what Gombrich and Obeyesekere label as 'Protestant Buddhism', which embodies the following characteristics:

- (1) It abandoned Buddhism's traditionally eirenic treatment of other religions and decorous style of presentation for a polemical stance.
- (2) It had a fundamentalist approach to Buddhism.
- (3) It claimed that Buddhism was not a religion but a philosophy.
- (4) Intertwined with all the above, especially the last – it depended on English-speaking concepts.

(1988: 218)

It is important to point out that the label/concept of 'Protestant Buddhism' has been challenged by many, on the grounds that the term is class-based and Eurocentric (Susantha Goonatilake 2001: 80–102) or on the grounds that it ascribes too much to Western influence and ignores Buddhist reform movements elsewhere that occurred without being determined by the presence of antagonistic Westerners (Blackburn 2001; Hallisey 1995: 47–49).

Given her ready acceptance of Gombrich and Obeyesekere's 'Protestant Buddhism' theory in her study of Buddhist nuns, it is perhaps not a surprise that Bartholomeusz sees the resurgence of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka along the line of political development. She suggests three phases of the resurgence (1994: 128). The first phase occurred between the period of the 1880s to



the 1940s, during which, according to Bartholomeusz, the resurgence of Buddhist nuns was predominantly by an elite, lay movement that aimed at the revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Lay elites, most notably Anagārika Dharmapāla, were vigorous in the founding and activities of some significant Buddhist and related organizations such as the Mahā Bōdhi Society (founded in 1891) and the Buddhist Theosophical Society (founded in 1880). In this phase, the desire to reestablish the (non-*bhikkhunī*) Buddhist nuns' order was associated with Sinhala national pride, and providing education for Buddhist women was seen as a primary vehicle for instilling traditional Buddhist values. The establishment of the Sanghamittā School for girls and a non-*bhikkhunī* nunnery, Sanghamittā Upāsikārāmaya, both sponsored by Anagārika Dharmapāla and other lay elites, testify to the social and political climate of the time that placed a closed link between the welfare of the Sinhala nation, Buddhism and Buddhist nuns (Bartholomeusz 1994: 44–49). Although Bartholomeusz traces the first Buddhist nun in modern Sri Lanka to an American woman, Countess Miranda de Souza Canavarro, who was invited by Anagārika Dharmapāla to head Sanghamittā Upāsikārāmaya around 1898 (1994: 53–88), Gombrich and Obeyesekere trace the first *Sinhala* Buddhist nun in modern Sri Lanka to Sister Sudhammācārī (1988: 277). Born as Catherine de Alwis to a prominent Sri Lankan Anglican Christian family around 1860s, she converted to Buddhism in her twenties and subsequently spent more than a decade pursuing Dharma study in Myanmar. Upon her return to Sri Lanka, a nunnery, Lady Blake Upāsikārāmaya, was founded in Kandy for her in 1907, and she lived and taught there until her death in 1939 (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 277–278). Even though Sister Sudhammācārī was well-learned in Buddhism, she never took *bhikkhunī* ordination, as she seemed to be more interested in pursuing spiritual practice and staying away from the political/social interest groups in Colombo. (For details on Sister Sudhammācārī's life, see Devendra 1987: 129–150). The Buddhist nun's tradition in Myanmar was and is still a non-*bhikkhunī* tradition (Kawanami 1990) and thus the monastic lineage transmitted by Sister Sudhammācārī from Myanmar to Sri Lanka was a non-*bhikkhunī* tradition. Yet, the nuns' order that she founded was to transform Sri Lankan Buddhist monasticism, for she opened the door for Sri Lankan women who wished to pursue Buddhist monastic practice. For nearly a century, the Buddhist nuns' tradition that was initiated by Sister Sudhammācārī was the only form of Buddhist monastic practice for women in Sri Lanka. Her contribution was profound:

It is with Sudhammācārī's project, however, the term *upāsikā* took on new meaning. No longer was it reserved for women who retire to a life of meditation in their own homes after family responsibility ends, nor even for women who maintain the precepts on *pōya* days or for extended periods. At [her order], young women

who considered themselves to be enlivening the tradition of female renunciation and elderly women, whose tradition it was to partially renounce the world toward the end of their lives, came together under one roof. Early twentieth-century Buddhists called both groups *upāsikās*. The merging of the two groups was symbolized by the colors Sudharmācārī and the other renunciants wore . . . outer robes were ochre, the color of monastic attire, while their blouse robes were white, the color of the laity. Their robes were thus a metaphor for their dual, and somewhat paradoxical, status as lay monastics.

(Bartholomeusz 1994: 99)

Because the monastic tradition installed by Sister Sudharmācārī was non-Vinaya based, Bartholomeusz terms these nuns, who later came to be commonly called '*dasa sil mātā*' (ten-precept mothers), as 'lay nuns' (1994). This is a term that I found many of my Sri Lankan informants disagree with, on the grounds that nobody can be both a 'lay' and a 'nun'. Since *dasa sil mātā* live in a celibate monastic lifestyle and observe ten precepts, I term them as 'ten-precept nuns' in this work.

In fact, Buddhism is so diverse that the very term 'nun' requires clarification. Technically speaking, a 'nun' in Buddhism refers to a woman who has received the monastic ordinations in accordance to the Vinaya. In reality, however, in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan, there are women who renounce household life and pursue a lifestyle of celibate monasticism without the Vinaya-based ordination. The meaning of 'nun' in Buddhism becomes even more complicated when one considers that in most Japanese Buddhist sects, 'monks' and 'nuns' are allowed to marry and live in a household lifestyle. Since this research focuses on the contexts of Sri Lanka and Taiwan only, I use the term 'nun' to refer to women who live in a celibate, monastic lifestyle, regardless of whether they have received the Vinaya-based ordination. Hence, because not all female renunciants of *zhaijiao* are celibate, I call them '*zhaijiao* women' rather than 'nuns' (see p. 37). On the basis that the '*dasa sil mātā*' (ten-precept mothers) in Sri Lanka live in a celibate and monastic lifestyle, I term them 'the ten-precept nuns' rather than 'lay nuns', albeit that their monastic status might be ambiguous in the discourse of the Vinaya.

According to Bartholomeusz, after Sri Lankan independence in 1948, the laity's support for female renunciation declined rapidly. No longer was Buddhist nunhood associated with Sinhala cultural revival, nor were women encouraged to enter nunhood. Because the post-Independence, Sinhala-dominated government could now direct state resources to ensure the welfare of Buddhist establishments, Sinhala Buddhist interests no longer needed to be channeled through the struggle for Buddhist nuns' establishment. As a result, the reestablishment of the Buddhist nuns' order lost its

significance in national politics. Hence, unlike the first phase of the resurgence of Buddhist nuns in Bartholomeusz's timetable, during which women were encouraged to enter Buddhist nunhood and those who did tended to come from the elite class, women who entered Buddhist nunhood in the second and third phases in Bartholomeusz's timetable tended to be from rural backgrounds and uneducated (Bartholomeusz 1994: 109–129). It seems that the post-Independence Sri Lankan government directs little state resources or attention to the welfare of Buddhist nuns, for both Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra (1987) find in their fieldwork in the late 1980s that Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns, namely the ten-precept nuns, were socially marginalized, economically deprived, institutionally neglected, and/or had little support from *bhikkhu*. They find Buddhist nuns poorly educated and untrained in both the *Vinaya* and Dharma. Bartholomeusz argues that partly because of their rural background and lack of education, partly because of social disapproval towards female renunciation, and partly because of social expectations for women to fulfill the roles of wives and mothers, the status of the ten-precept nuns in the late twentieth century was lower than a century earlier (1994: 130–138). In my fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2002, however, I found that the situation has somewhat improved. The ten-precept nuns can now apply for state funding for their education, and many Buddhist nuns now have financial and social support from both international sources (e.g. Sakyadhita) and domestic sources (e.g. Sarvodaya<sup>2</sup>). The following is Bartholomeusz's timetable for the resurgence of Buddhist nuns in contemporary Sri Lanka and the addition that I make to bring it up to date:

1880s–1940s	Colonial Ceylon/elite politics Elite Buddhist revival gathers momentum Elite women renounce
1950s–1960s	Post-independence Ceylon/varied participation in politics Mass Buddhist revival gathers momentum Varied participation of elite and rural women in [the ten-precept nuns'] nunneries
1970s–[late 1980s]	The Ceylon government once again 'protects' Buddhism Goal of Buddhist revival is achieved Rural women characterize the tradition of female world-renunciation (Bartholomeusz 1994: 128)
Late 1980s–	<i>Buddhist feminist movement emerges, both in Sri Lanka and internationally</i> <i>Attention is shifted to the reestablishment of the bhikkhunī sangha.</i> <i>Varied participation of elite and rural women in the ten-precept nuns' order and the bhikkhunī order</i>

Several changes to state policy that have occurred since the 1980s helped to improve the welfare of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka, such as the promotion program for ten-precept nuns by the Department of Buddhist Affairs in 1983, the provision of educational facilities to prepare ten-precept nuns for examinations on 'Buddhist studies and oriental languages' (*pracheena*), the opening to ten-precept nuns in 1995 of fifteen monastic educational institutions (*pirivena*) that had previously opened only to monks, and the founding of a national federation of ten-precept nuns (Goonatilake 2001: 3). However, none of the changes, as stated above, mentions *bhikkhunī*. Some thus interpret the increasing support from both the state and *bhikkhu* for ten-precept nuns as a manifestation of resistance against the *bhikkhunī* movement (e.g. *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, see the next section). The situation of the ten-precept nuns during the time of my Sri Lankan fieldwork in 2002 is impossible to generalize, for while I encountered some well-established ten-precept nuns' nunneries, such as the one that also functioned as meditation center and appeared to be financially well-sponsored, I also met many other ten-precept nuns who appeared to be living in a materially deprived condition. The sharpest contrast to Bartholomeusz's (1994) and Devendra's (1987) findings from the late 1980s is in the area of education. Throughout my Sri Lankan fieldwork, I encountered many well-educated nuns (both the ten-precept nuns and *bhikkhunī*), some of them holders of postgraduate degrees. In addition, I also visited some institutions that provided education for nuns, and nuns who were pursuing higher education.

In the area of the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* sangha, history is unfolding in Sri Lanka. It is sometimes assumed that the efforts for restoring the *bhikkhunī* order surfaced only under the influence of the Western Buddhist feminist movement that emerged around 1980s (Barnes 1994: 144; Boucher 1988: 91–92).

In reality, the calls to reestablish the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka emerged much earlier. In 1934, Gunapala Malalasekera, the President and founder of the World Federation of Buddhists, drawing on the *Cullavagga* of *Vinaya Pitaka*, which contains a statement saying, 'I permit you *Bhikkhus*, to confer higher ordination on *bhikkhunīs*', advocated the restoration of the *bhikkhunī* order regardless of the absence of a *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka at the time (Goonatilake 2001: 3). In 1952, after leading a delegation to a Buddhist Conference in China, *bhikkhu* Pandit Narawila Dharmaratana Maha Thero writes,

The absence of the Bhikkhunī Order is a great loss to this country. The number of women who aspire to be Bhikkhunī's and are content to be Dasa Sil Mātās as a result is not small. There are about 2500 of them at present in Sri Lanka. The Bhikkhunī Order in China are their puillary descendants. The Bhikkhunī Order there exists in its purity and unbroken line of succession. Therefore it is

most fitting that we restore the Bhikkhunī Order in Sri Lanka with the assistance of Chinese Bhikkhunī's.

(quoted in Weeraratne 1994: 18)

The two statements above show that long before the issue of *bhikkhunī* ordination gained the attention of Western Buddhist feminists in the late twentieth century, there had been calls initiated by Sri Lankans to restore the *bhikkhunī* order. What we should note here, however, is the international context of these Sri Lankans.

More noticeable efforts for the restoration of the *bhikkhunī* order in recent years did emerge, in the 1980s. In the commemorative magazine of the 1998 international higher ordination (organized by Taiwanese sangha, Foguangshan, more details later) the English version of the preface reads, 'In gratitude for having received the [*bhikkhunī*] lineage from Indian and Sri Lanka's missionaries, the Chinese feel that it is their duty to return the lost [*bhikkhunī*] lineage to their ancestral lands'.<sup>3</sup> This statement echoes Hema Goonatilake's campaign of restoring the *bhikkhunī* order through the claim of the historical link between Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* lineage and the Chinese *bhikkhunī* lineage, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Hema Goonatilake's campaign began in 1984 when she embarked on a study/lecture tour to South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and China, where she observed the *bhikkhunī* sangha in Mahāyāna tradition. She recalls:

I found that the role of *Bhikkhunīs* both in South Korea and Taiwan where *bhikkhunīs* outnumber *Bhikkhus* was impressive. In Taiwan, the activities of *Bhikkhunī's* seemed more organized and well patronized. I was convinced that Sri Lankan [ten-precept] nuns should receive higher ordination from the Chinese tradition, the main reason being that the Sri Lankan women have a legitimate right to get back the higher ordination, which was conferred by them on the Chinese *Bhikkhunīs* in 433 C.E. . . . In Taiwan at the [Foguangshan] nunnery in Taipei where I had good interpretation services, I gave two public lectures during the two-week period I stayed. In one lecture, I outlined the history of events that led the Chinese *Bhikkhunīs* to receive higher ordination from Sri Lankan *Bhikkhunīs*, and the need for the Sri Lankan *Bhikkhunīs* to get it back from the Chinese.

(Goonatilake 2001: 4)

After returning to Sri Lanka, Hema Goonatilake wrote to newspapers, arguing for the legitimacy of receiving *bhikkhunī* ordination from the Chinese tradition (Weeraratne 1994: 18). In 1988, a delegation of ten Sri Lankan nuns traveled to the USA to receive *bhikkhunī* ordination at the

Foguangshan branch temple, Hsi Lia Temple (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 12–13). However, Sri Lankan society in the late 1980s did not seem to be ready for the *bhikkhunī* order, for according to some of my Sri Lankan informants, some of the *bhikkhunī* ordained in 1988 had disrobed and some of them received a second higher ordination to affirm their Theravāda identity in order to be more acceptable to Sri Lankan society. The next noteworthy effort to restore the *bhikkhunī* order occurred in 1996 when a team of selected Sri Lankan nuns, with the support of some leading *bhikkhu* in Sri Lanka, traveled to Sarnath, India, the birthplace of the *bhikkhunī* order, to receive trainings and *bhikkhunī* ordination from South Korean preceptors (Goonatilake 2001: 7). Then in February 1998, the Taiwanese sangha, Foguangshan organized another higher ordination at Bodhgaya, India, in which fourteen monks and 135 nuns from various countries (including Sri Lanka) received higher ordination from a team of international preceptors (including Sri Lankan *bhikkhu*).<sup>4</sup> According to Hema Goonatilake, the 1998 higher ordination at Bodhgaya is more acceptable to Sri Lankan society. The reason is that in the Bodhgaya ordination, the whole process was translated into English and Sinhala, and the candidates were allowed to dress in the robes of their own traditions, so that this ordination did not appear to be wholly ‘Mahāyāna’ and thus was easier for Sri Lankans to identify with. Moreover, a few months after returning to Sri Lanka, *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala organized another higher ordination for the twenty *bhikkhunī* who had received another higher ordination in Bodhgaya in order to strengthen their claim to Theravāda tradition. Hence, the nuns who received *bhikkhunī* ordination at Bodhgaya in 1998 faced fewer obstacles in regard to the acceptance of their new monastic status in Sri Lanka (Goonatilake 2001: 8). The determination to maintain their Theravāda identity is strong among Sri Lankan Buddhists. Although Li Yu-chen claims that the 1998 international higher ordination in Bodhgaya was sensitive to Theravāda sentiment and Theravāda candidates did not engage in the ordination procedure that is associated with Mahāyāna tradition (that is, receiving *Bodhisattva* vows) (2000b: 171–174), apparently, the 1998 Bodhgaya higher ordination was still too ‘Mahāyāna’ for the Sri Lankan ordination candidates and they needed to receive another higher ordination from Sri Lankan monks.

At the time of my fieldwork in 2002, the *bhikkhunī* order has reappeared on Sri Lankan soil, and there have been several *bhikkhunī* ordinations that were organized by Sri Lankans and took place in Sri Lanka (e.g. the International Higher Ordination by Tapodhanaramaya Temple, Mount Lavinia, during 3–4 March 2002). Therefore, it might be safe to say that the acceptance of the *bhikkhunī* order has grown in Sri Lanka since Bartholomeusz’s (1994) and Devendra’s (1987) fieldwork in the late 1980s. History is indeed unfolding in Sri Lanka, and the picture of Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns will be very different in the near future.

Table 2 Timeline for the development of the Buddhist nuns' order in Sri Lanka

c. 250 BCE	<i>Establishment of the bhikkhunī order by Sanghamittā</i>
433 CE	A delegate of Sri Lankan bhikkhunī traveled to China and transmitted the <i>bhikkhunī</i> order to the Chinese.
c. Tenth century	The <i>bhikkhunī</i> order disappeared in Sri Lanka.
1907	Sister Sudharmācārī opened Srī Sudharmācārī Upāsikārāmaya (later known as Lady Blake's) in Katukale, Kandy and the tradition of the ten-precept nuns was installed in Sri Lanka.
1934	Gunapala Malalasekera, President and founder of the World Federation of Buddhists, advocated the restoration of the <i>bhikkhunī</i> order.
1952	<i>Bhikkhu</i> Pandit Narawila Dharmaratana Maha Thero advocated the restoration of the <i>bhikkhunī</i> order.
1986	Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women) was founded.
1988	A delegation of ten Sri Lankan nuns traveled to the USA to receive the <i>bhikkhunī</i> ordination at a branch temple of Foguangshan of Taiwan.
1996	<i>Bhikkhunī</i> ordination provided by South Korean preceptors in Sarnath, India.
1998	International Higher Ordination organized by Foguangshan of Taiwan in Bodhgaya, India; the same year <i>bhikkhunī</i> ordination was given at the Golden Temple in Dambulla, Sri Lanka.

In the following subsections are three case studies, one of an individual and two of institutions, to illustrate in more depth of the situation of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka. The first is *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, spoken of by many as 'the first *bhikkhunī* in the contemporary Sri Lanka'. The second is Sri Sanghamittā Education Center, which is chosen with the purpose of showing the struggle and self-help efforts of the ten-precept nuns. The third is Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center, which was established as an attempt to institute the *bhikkhunī* order in Theravāda tradition.

### **Bhikkhunī Kusuma<sup>5</sup>**

*Bhikkhunī* Kusuma, ordained in 1996, is commonly regarded by people in the Colombo area as 'the first *bhikkhunī* in contemporary Sri Lanka'.<sup>6</sup> *Bhikkhunī* Kusuma is a highly accomplished scholar and is well-respected among Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

Born in Colombo in 1929, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma came from a well-to-do Sinhala family. Her father, an engineer in the government service, had a car. This shows the affluence of the family, for it was an era when the native Sri Lankans were unlikely to own cars. Her mother was a housewife but



taught in a Buddhist Sunday school for nineteen years. Even though her father was educated at a Christian school, the whole family was immersed in the elite urban Buddhist atmosphere. The family personally knew Anagārika Dharmapāla, who was perhaps the most-influential lay leader of the Sinhala Buddhist revival movement in the pre-Independence period. She recalled,

That was a time very close to the Revival [Movement]. People were very religious then, more religious than now. Now people are corrupted, because of many influences. Now people are more materialist. . . . My father and my grandfather all knew Anagārika Dharmapāla. He gave that influence to start. My parents were educated, and they also followed the [Buddhist] path. They *lived it*.<sup>7</sup>

But her mother and grandmother seemed to have greater direct Buddhist influence on her than the father's involvement with the Buddhist Revival Movement. In her first Ph.D. thesis, *The Dasasil Nun: a study of the women's Buddhist religious movement in Sri Lanka, with an outline of its historical antecedents* (1987, in the name of Kusuma Devendra<sup>8</sup>), she mentioned that she had personally known several ten-precept nuns since childhood. She spoke of that in the interview, too. It seemed that her mother often invited the ten-precept nuns to their home for alms-giving. Her mother's sister was a ten-precept nun and her mother also became a ten-precept nun in her old age. Her grandmother was a great Buddhist influence, too. Well-educated, the grandmother knew Pāli, which *bhikkhunī* Kusuma speculates to have been self-learned from monks' chanting in temples, and taught *bhikkhunī* Kusuma how to chant in Pāli at an early age. In other words, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma did not come from a nominal, rural Buddhist family, whose involvement with Buddhism probably comes mainly through rituals and customary alms-giving. On the contrary, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma's family was from the urban, Sinhala elite class who consciously chose to participate in the Buddhist Revival Movement.

*Bhikkhunī* Kusuma herself was sent to study in Ananda College (English-medium), which was perhaps one of the earliest Buddhist colleges in Sri Lanka. The curriculum at the school included Buddhism and Pāli in the lower classes. She did well and won a Distinction at O Level. She then went on to study at a predominantly male medical school and obtained her first degree in medicine. She recalls, 'During the war time, they allowed us to study in one of the biggest boys' school. That was difficult.' Being one of the only three female students at the medical school, she attracted a great deal of attention from male schoolmates and often received love letters. Upon graduation, she was not accepted for further education in medicine because of her sex, so she went on to become a science teacher at a government school for twelve years. After marriage, her contacts with Buddhist nuns



lessened, though her family continued to support a monks' temple. With six children and a full-time job, her involvement with Buddhist activities declined for some years. It was not until the age of 40, when a friend took her to a meditation center, that her involvement with Buddhism resumed. She soon became a resident at the meditation center.

Meanwhile, she was offered a scholarship in the USA, so she went to study molecular biology at an American university. She missed her children too much, however, and she gave up her studying in the USA after only one semester. With a travel scholarship, she was able to visit universities in about twenty countries before coming home to Sri Lanka. She did not go back to her teaching job:

I wanted to study the origin of life; that's why I chose molecular biology. But then they told me that science has not discovered it. They told me that science cannot teach life. So I thought maybe I should try with Buddhism.

Therefore, she quit her teaching job and returned to university to study for a degree in Buddhism, Pāli and English: 'I was thinking why people were born? Why people suffer? Then all people die. . . . After studying Buddhism, I knew that I did not have to search anymore. I have found the answer.' She was later offered a post to teach English at the university, and she stayed in that post for twenty years. During those years, she taught at the university and at the same time pursued further education. 'I took a lunch pack and went to the library at four o'clock in the morning. I studied for the whole day, every day. I had a teaching post at the university, so I had the privilege to use the library [for long hours].' She also studied the *Tripitaka* in Pāli and English.

When I asked her why she chose to do research on the ten-precept nuns for her Ph.D. thesis, she replied:

That I couldn't understand. I couldn't understand why I did any of those. Why I changed from science? Why I chose this topic for my Ph.D. research? But it all came to me naturally. Now I understand – it's pure [confidence in Dharma]. I think it must be coming from the previous life. There was no real reason. I only did it because I liked it. . . . I also knew that nuns were poor and monks were very well-supported. I also wanted to know why this. . . . I didn't know why [the ten-precept nuns] were in such a difficult situation. After my study, I realized it. I was also supporting the monks. I didn't know about [ten-precept nuns].

About one hundred ten-precept nuns were interviewed for her research. She sometimes stayed in a nunnery and observed their activities. She went to

great lengths to visit the ten-precept nuns in remote areas. When speaking of the ruins of Lady Blake's (Lady Blake Upāsikārāmaya, the first ten-precept nuns' nunnery), she commented, 'It's nobody's fault [for the ruins]. It's just that no one is caring.'

She continued to teach English at the university until retirement. But at the same time, she began to teach Buddhism. For eighteen years, she appeared on a weekly half-hour radio program as one of the four commentators teaching Buddhism. Besides that radio program, she also gave 'lots of talks' on Buddhism. Because she mostly taught Buddhism in English, she admitted that she was not very well-known to the Sinhala-speaking population. She submitted her first Ph.D. dissertation in 1987, but because of the riots in the country, universities were closed for some years, and her Ph.D. dissertation was 'just lying there for two years'. But then, she was asked to rewrite her Ph.D. book because of her recommendation for the reinstitution of the *bhikkhunī* order in her thesis. She explained:

The word *bhikkhunī* was a taboo, so they asked me to change it. I didn't like that. So it remained like that for some years. . . . Yes, [my professors] don't like *bhikkhunī*. They never want *bhikkhunī*. . . . They thought it's all Theravāda. They considered *bhikkhunī* as Mahāyāna. They think Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* don't live like *bhikkhunī*. . . . I think most of the *bhikkhunī* are good. I was there in Taiwan. But they are mostly Mahāyāna and they practice mostly social-Bodhisattvas vows and it is not the original Pāli. It's not the original Buddhism; it's different. But they are good.

In 1987, the Sakyadhita movement started. Kusuma soon became involved with this movement and chaired the committee for Vinaya research. She was invited by a German scholar to study the *bhikkhunī* Vinaya in Germany for three months. Her second Ph.D. dissertation was submitted to the Buddhist and Pāli University of Sri Lanka in 1999, titled: *The Bhikkhunī Vinaya: a study of the Vinaya rules of bhikkhunī's and translation of the Pāli bhikkhunī Pātimokkha with commentarial reference*. Her Ph.D. title, however, had been granted even before the submission of her second dissertation.

Throughout her study, meditation played an important role in her life. She would sometimes attend a six-month retreat. Meanwhile, the Mahā Bōdhi Society began the *bhikkhunī* movement and began to train nuns for the upcoming *bhikkhunī* ordination in India.

I had written all these theses. I knew the Vinaya; I knew the discipline, because I had been studying. I was in Korea for three months; I was studying their *bhikkhunī* ordination. . . . Then, I was asked to come to teach the nuns who would be given ordination. . . . But when I came to teach the nuns, the nuns weren't educated enough.

So the organization said that the nuns are not good enough for the international ordination because it's a historical instance. Then the chief monks insisted that I should join and become the chief *bhikkhunī*. If not, they are going to cancel it. I was ready to, anyway. But I had not decided. That's why on the invitation I became a *bhikkhunī*. . . . Before I used to think I am not going to become a [ten-precept nun]. But when *bhikkhunī* ordination comes, I want to become a *bhikkhunī*. . . . Because [the ten-precept nuns] had no discipline, no Vinaya rules, no recognitions. They have no place to stay; their temples are not recognized by the government like the monks' temples. They are small private houses.

Her family was supportive of her decision to enter the order and seemed to be keeping a fond relationship with her:

I didn't need their permission. I was already leaving the house for long periods of time. I was in retreats. And my children had grown up. And my son had married, living in the house, even looking after the father. So, I was free. . . . My husband already knew I was in long retreats. They got used to it. I also got used to being without the family. . . . Yes, [I keep in touch with my family]. Even now the calls<sup>9</sup> come from [my children]!

*Bhikkhunī* Kusuma was optimistic about the future of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka:

Yes, at the moment, the government and the monks don't want to recognize *bhikkhunī*. But [the ten-precept nuns] were not recognized for a hundred years. Now they think it's better to have [the ten-precept nuns] than *bhikkhunī*. It's just their wish. . . . Now, little by little, people know that there is *bhikkhunī*. . . . People don't recognize; people don't understand. So we have to go naturally, you see. We can't be too formal, too strict. . . . It's better to go slow.

For *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, the reason for becoming a *bhikkhunī* came mostly from the spiritual dimension:

It's important because [one] can keep Vinaya rules. Then, the Buddha instituted *bhikkhunī*, not [the ten-precept nuns]. Then no one was called Dasasil Mātā. In the absence of *bhikkhunī*, they had come on their own. . . . So, if there is a *bhikkhu*, you have to be a *bhikkhunī*. You also have to keep all the rules. You can't just put on the robes and call yourself [a ten-precept nun]. There are many things to do for the *bhikkhunī*, to be equal to the *bhikkhu* –

the rules of disciplines. And then, we are also entitled to all the privileges as the *bhikkhu*, the training centers and everything. Not [the ten-precept nuns], they are not recognized.

Speaking of the Eight Special Rules, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma was convinced that the Eight Special Rules were a later invention:

Garudharma (the Eight Special Rules) was a later invention, but they are giving it as the Buddha's order. . . . Because they say it's from the Buddha, we can study and argue whether it's the Buddha's or from later teachers. . . . There are other possibilities. It's similar to the Jainism. It's most likely to be Jainist or Brahman who had written it. Not Buddhist, but putting there like the Buddha's words. . . . No, [I don't have to observe the Garudharma]. They don't come with the rules, the 311 rules. It doesn't apply. . . . But some of [Garudharma] is within the rules also that we observe. . . . Yes, [we pay homage to *bhikkhu*] because they are mostly senior to us. . . . [Never have a *bhikkhu* paid homage to me.] It's all because of Garudharma. But in the ancient, it isn't like that. Garudharma has changed the whole matter, and it has strike *bhikkhunī* and *bhikkhu* also. . . . I have only written a book. I don't teach [Garudharma]. It's a big problem to teach. How can I explain in a few sentences what I have said in this book? So I allow them to read my book. . . . You believe in these traditions, and it's hard to get rid of them in a day. . . . This is rooted. . . . Sometimes, I write to newspaper, little by little. Because it might open up unnecessary controversy and I will have no chance to say what I have to say. . . . So I allow them to go slowly, and learn it.

*Bhikkhunī* Kusuma argues that the status of *bhikkhunī* does not necessarily guarantee a positive progress on the spiritual path. 'It's all an individual matter', and depended on individuals' 'knowledge, lifestyle, goal, etc.' Considering Pāli as the original Buddhist language and more ancient than Sanskrit, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma argued that Theravāda Buddhism was the authentic form of Buddhism and there had been too many non-Buddhist influences in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Furthermore, the *Bodhisattva* ideal in the Mahāyāna Buddhism might lead one away from spiritual practice, because the *Bodhisattva* ideal was too concerned with this-worldly matters, and the idea that one should be inspired to attain *Buddhahood* in the future life rather than seeking liberation in this very own life was impractical and negative.

At the time of my fieldwork, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma was busy with establishing an international meditation center. Being a woman and an English-speaker, she believed that she could offer more help to foreign women who

wish to learn meditation than other non-English speaking nuns or English-speaking monks. However, she regretted that she does not have as much time to do meditation as she wishes, because laypeople who seek her advice and people like me who wish to learn from her take up too much of her time. Though not formally taught in colleges, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma often gave lectures in Buddhism to nuns and laypeople alike. At my first visit to her, she was about to give a Buddhist class to foreign diplomats' wives. I believe that the work she does now will have a lasting impact on the Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

### *Sri Sanghamittā Education Center*

Any notion that non-*bhikkhunī* nuns in Sri Lanka are powerless victims who are either unaware of the possibility of improving their own situation or would submissively accept whatever situation they found themselves in is proved wrong by the case of Sri Sanghamittā Education Center. Founded in 1983, Sri Sanghamittā Education Center is a Buddhist nunnery school founded by Sri Lankan nuns and for nuns. According to my informants, there were seventeen schools for non-*bhikkhunī* nuns that were recognized by the government in 2002, and Sri Sanghamittā Education Center is among the pioneer schools for the non-*bhikkhunī* nuns.

Before there was Sri Sanghamittā Education Center, on the same ground stood a temple of the ten-precept nuns. The temple continues to exist, side by side with the school. At the time of my visits in March 2002, the school housed sixteen ten-precept nun students, including several from Nepal, and one teacher from England. None of the students here obtained the *bhikkhunī* status. The school does not shy away from learning from non-monastic members, for its teachers included laymen and laywomen.

According to the head nun, Mathale Dharmadhairā Sil Mātā, she founded this school because of the difficulties for Buddhist nuns to gain the necessary education, including both Buddhist education and secular education. She herself had frustrating experiences of seeking education, for during her youth, the only way for Buddhist nuns to gain education was through the monks' temples. Believing that a separate school for Buddhist nuns would make it easier for nuns to pursue education, Mathale Dharmadhairā Sil Mātā and several other Buddhist nuns founded Sri Sanghamittā Education Center in 1983. This was to be a nunnery school that aims at providing educational opportunity for Buddhist nuns. The goal of Sri Sanghamittā Education Center, according to Mathale Dharmadhairā Sil Mātā, is to provide comprehensive training in both Buddhist and secular sectors for Buddhist nuns. It intends its graduates to be not only erudite Buddhist preachers but also capable of running religious institutions by themselves. Thus, training at Sri Sanghamittā Education Center includes the instruction and

participation in rituals such as chanting and praying, and other practical skills that are usually taught at temples rather than Buddhist monastic schools.

Setting up a school for Buddhist nuns was not an easy task. I was informed that it was nearly impossible to obtain Buddhist textbooks at first, and one monk even told them that it was 'illegal' for the nuns to study. It was only due to the sympathy of some monks, who smuggled textbooks out of monks' monastic schools (*pirivena*), that the nuns had the opportunity to engage in the same curriculum as *pirivena*.

The establishment of Sri Sanghamittā Education Center coincided with the government's attempt to promote the ten-precept nuns' order. In 1983, the Department of Buddhist Affairs initiated a program of action for the promotion of the ten-precept nuns, and the program includes providing district level monastic educational institutes for them (Goonatilake 2001: 3). But it was not until 1986 that Sri Sanghamittā Education Center was formally recognized by the government and given financial aid. However, the head nun complained that the governmental financial aid was so small in comparison to the monks', and the school had to rely largely on donations from the lay community. At the time of my visits, there were ten teachers at the school but only five of them received governmental financial aid, which was only 500 rupees per person per month.<sup>10</sup> As such, the teachers had to seek financial means from elsewhere (e.g. lay donations, if they were themselves Buddhist nuns). All of the teachers, both the monastic and the lay teachers, have at least a university degree and some of them have postgraduate degrees. Every student resides at school, and each one of them receives 200 rupees per month financial aid from the government. In order to facilitate school affairs, the school collects the money from the students and in return provides housing, textbooks, etc. As is the custom in Sri Lanka, villagers also often came to offer alms, such as a meal for the nuns.

The curriculum of the school indicates that it does not intend to shut itself off in a secluded environment. In addition to Pāli, Sanskrit, Dharma, and Vinaya – the usual study subjects for members of sangha – the school also provides secular subjects such as English, Math, Science, etc. Furthermore, graduates from the school are eligible to sit government exams for GCE O level or GCE A level (secular education), and government-recognized exams for Buddhism and Oriental Languages (*pracheena*). The length of study at the school generally depends on the students' own progress: while some might stay for twelve years, others might graduate in only six years (Table 3). After graduation, students are allowed to live continually at the school throughout the time they attend university. I talked with a teacher nun who was herself a graduate from Sri Sanghamittā Education Center and subsequently went on to pursue university education and eventually obtained an MA degree.

Table 3 Levels of training at Sri Sanghamittā Education Center

<i>Length of study</i>	<i>Secular education</i>	<i>Buddhist education</i>
5 years	GCE O level	First level of Buddhism and Oriental Languages exam
3 years	GCE A level	Second level of Buddhism and Oriental Languages exam
1 year (diploma)	University	
3 years (BA)		
1 year (MA)		

At the beginning, the school advertised in the newspapers to attract potential students, but the source of potential students at present comes via the word-of-mouth method, and any Buddhist nun who observes at least eight precepts is welcome to come to study at the school. According to Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā, the students who have graduated generally maintain good relations with the school. For example, they often come back to help conduct religious rituals. Students at the school come from various parts of Sri Lanka, and the Nepali students were recommended by a Buddhist monk who had ‘international connections’.

The school is responsive to social changes. Though located in a remote village, and lacking running water at the time of my visits, the school was already planning to set up a computer room and a children/women library (a Dharma library for the nun already existed), so that its students and the local village children/women might be better equipped with up-to-date knowledge. When asked about the difficulties that they were facing, Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā mentioned finance, which was apparent to me, given the humble furniture and the lack of running water at the school.

Even though none of its teachers or students had the *bhikkhunī* status, it does not follow that they opposed the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order. They refrained from receiving the higher ordination simply because they wished to receive it within their original lineage. ‘If we all go and become *bhikkhunī* [by the ordination provided in another lineage], who is going to look after this lineage?’ said one nun, ‘The lineage will be broken. There will only be old nuns who become nuns because they have no children to look after them.’ It also does not follow that the nuns at Sri Sanghamittā Education Center resent the *bhikkhunī* movement. In fact, the head nun, Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā, herself has a sister who was a *bhikkhuni*, and according to other nuns, the *bhikkhunī* sister visited the Center occasionally. The nuns also told me that Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā once appeared on the radio, urging monks of her lineage to give the *bhikkhunī* ordination, for she argued that the *Vinaya* allowed *bhikkhu* to give the *bhikkhunī*



ordination in the absence of the *bhikkhunī* order. Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā also wrote articles for newspapers regarding this issue, but it was such a controversial issue that many of the articles were never published. Although unable to obtain the *bhikkhunī* ordination from the monks in their lineage, the school is able to provide the *sāmanerī* ordination for students who had studied there for at least four years and were over the age of 18. Those who do not wish to obtain the *sāmanerī* ordination are still welcome to continue to live and study at the school. Accordingly, it is important to note that some of the teachers and students at the school are not mere, non-*Vinaya*-based ‘ten-precept nuns’, but *sāmanerī*, formal members of sangha. Furthermore, I was even asked by Mathale Dharmadhaira Sil Mātā of the possibility of sending its students to study in Taiwan. This question itself indicates that the school is open to new ideas and does not want to shy away from changes.

Sri Sanghamittā Education Center reflects the improving situation of non-*bhikkhunī* nuns in Sri Lanka. With the recognition and support from the government, the ten-precept nuns in the twenty-first century will probably enjoy better educational opportunities and social status than nuns during the period of Bartholomeusz’s (1994) and Devendra’s (1987) fieldwork in the late 1980s.

### *Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center*

People outside of Sri Lanka may have a tendency to associate the *bhikkhunī* movement with Sakyadhita (International Association of Buddhist Women). This is probably the result of its publications in the West. However, in Sri Lanka, an indigenous organization for the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order has been born – the Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center. It is important to note that while I call this organization ‘Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center’, its formal name probably differs in Sinhala. Although in the introductory booklets by *bhikkhunī* Bhadra (Coordinator of the International Unit) and *bhikkhunī* Kothmale Siri Sumedha (Secretary), the institution is called as ‘Bhikkhunī Training Center’, the signboard at the entrance of the institution says ‘Bhikkhunī Educational Academy’. When I inquired, the nuns replied that they hoped to establish a government-recognized academy in the future. I add ‘Dambulla’ before the title in my work in order to distinguish this institution from other *bhikkhunī* training centers, such as the Sakyadhita Bhikkhunī Training Center in the Colombo area.

The Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center is located in a remote village near the ancient city Dambulla. At the time of my visit in 2002, there was no electricity or running water, and classes were held outdoors. Although the roof of the student dormitory, which contained twelve small rooms, had been repaired the year before, the floor was bumpy and the whole dormitory dark and damp. One of the buildings functioned as a kitchen



and dinning hall, and the small huts were for the teachers when they traveled from their villages to come here to teach. Although the location might be secluded and the conditions might be difficult, it was here that I witnessed the spirit of self-determination and the efforts to restore Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* sangha. For example, all the teachers at the center were volunteers. They not only devoted their time to come here to teach but also paid their own travel costs.

The formation of Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center began soon after the higher ordination in Sarnath, India in 1996. As the news of the higher ordination provoked a heated debate in Sri Lanka, a meeting among the ten-precept nuns, *bhikkhu* and laypeople was held. The result of this meeting was the founding of the 'Sri Lankan Bhikkhunī Re-awakening Organization' in March 1997, which aims at providing training and the higher ordination for the ten-precept nuns. A resolution was passed that ten-precept nuns between the ages of 30 and 35, with a minimum of five years of ordination, the educational level of at least eight O levels and three A levels (or a pass in the examinations in Buddhism and Oriental Languages), and well-trained in Dharma and meditation, were eligible to apply for training for the planned higher ordination. Approximately 200 nuns applied, and eventually twenty-six were selected and finished the training. In July 1997, the twenty-six nuns received the *sāmaṇerī* ordination (*bhikkhunī* Bhadra 2001: 31–33).

As they continued their training and waited for the higher ordination, the information that an international higher ordination was to be held in Bodhgaya in February 1998 by a Taiwanese sangha, Foguangshan, was passed to the organization and the Foguangshan organizer invited twenty Sri Lankan *sāmaṇerī* to join the event. After the request of maintaining Theravāda tradition was accepted, a group of twenty selected *sāmaṇerī*-candidates and fifteen *bhikkhu* joined the international higher ordination in Bodhgaya. Though they received the *bhikkhunī* ordination at the Bodhgaya international higher ordination, one month later the twenty nuns received another higher ordination at the ancient Golden Temple in Dambulla, which, in the nuns' opinion, was conducted in accordance with Theravāda tradition.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that in the 1998 Bodhgaya international ordination, candidates of Theravāda tradition refrained from taking Bodhisattvas vows and several eminent Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* (e.g. Pandith Talalle Dharmaloka and Inamaluwe Sumangala) were among the preceptors (*ācārya*),<sup>12</sup> it was essential for the Dambulla nuns to maintain their Theravāda identity and crucial for them to receive another higher ordination in Theravāda setting in order to strengthen their claim to Theravāda tradition. Dambulla *bhikkhunī* Bhadra said:

There were together twenty-six nuns to train [at the Center]. About nine months. Previously they thought to give higher ordination from

*bhikkhu*, only from the *bhikkhu* in Sri Lanka according to [Buddhist text]. But while they were training, we received invitation from Taiwan, Foguangshan to that international higher ordination in Bodhgaya. As they invited us, they promised us to give us higher ordination according to Theravāda tradition. But also for [non-*bhikkhunī* nuns] from other Theravāda traditions, they promised to us Theravāda ordination. They asked us to bring our robes and bowl, and to bring our *thera* with us. And because they have a lineage from Sri Lanka: the *bhikkhunī* lineage from Sri Lanka went to China; from China, it went to Taiwan, Korea and all other countries. So they said it's our lineage. So, they wanted to give us back. They said they can do it according to Theravāda tradition, but we have to bring our bowl, robes and *bhikkhu sanghā*. From Dambulla, the organization got together, and the [leading *bhikkhu*] decided to take our *sāmanerī* to go to Bodhgaya. We went because they agreed to give higher ordination according to Theravāda tradition.<sup>13</sup>

It was among the members of Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center that I found the determination to preserve the Theravāda tradition especially strong. Four out of the five nun-teachers whom I talked to bluntly refused to recognize *bhikkhunī* ordained in the Mahāyāna tradition as *bhikkhunī*. For example, they denied *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, who is regarded highly in the Colombo area, as a real *bhikkhunī*, for she did not receive Theravāda higher ordination.

One influential figure in the Dambulla *Bhikkhunī* order is *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera, abbot of the 2200-year-old monastery of Dambulla Rock Temple and President of the Sri Lanka Bhikkhunī Re-awakening Organization. Many nuns spoke of him with gratitude and respect. He is a high-ranking *bhikkhu* and advocates the restoration of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order. No stranger to controversy, *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera had previously caused a controversy when he provided the *bhikkhu* ordination at Dambulla Golden Temple in 1985 without the traditional concession from Asgiriya monks. It was an act that not only challenged the authority of Asgiriya *nikāyas*<sup>14</sup> over Dambulla Golden Temple but also challenged the Asgiriya tradition of providing *bhikkhu* ordination only to high-caste men. With the power to provide *bhikkhu* ordination at his own temple, *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera established himself and his temple as an independent monastic authority away from the authority of Asgiriya *nikāyas* (Abeysekara 1999). And with the laity's support and the success of the new *bhikkhu* ordination at Dambulla Golden Temple, by providing the *bhikkhunī* ordination he was able to pose another challenge to the existing authority, which might not consent to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* sangha.

As one of the founding members of the Sri Lankan Bhikkhunī Re-awakening Organization, *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera played a crucial role in the reestablishment of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* sangha. First, he was the one who donated the eight acres of land, previously a meditation center, to establish the Bhikkhunī Training Center. Secondly, he also donated a deserted temple to establish the International Unit for foreign women who ‘want to be ordained in the Theravāda tradition’.<sup>15</sup> But most important is perhaps *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala Thera’s role in the constitution of acceptance for *bhikkhunī* sangha in Sri Lanka:

It is noteworthy that several strategies were adopted by the Sumangala Thera to promote the recognition of Bhikkhunis from the very beginning of the training programmes. . . . Lay devotees of all trainee [the ten-precept nuns], whatever district and province they came from, whether far or near were expected to contribute to the programme by providing food to all trainees, based on a roster system. Through this strategy, the lay devotees from all over the country came to identify themselves with the training programme as well as with the final outcome of the programme. . . . Another strategy . . . was to lay out a detailed plan for reception activities when the Bhikkhunis return to their communities after receiving higher ordination. . . . The most recent triumphant landmark was made in the welcome speech made by Sumangala Thera at the opening ceremony of the colossal statue and the newly constructed building complex at his temple premises. When he addressed the gathering as, ‘Bhikkhu Bhikkhunī Upasaka Upasika’ (fourfold disciples of the Buddha), it was history unfolding after nearly one thousand years.

(H. Goonatilake 2001: 9)

Being an active supporter for the reestablishment of Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* sangha, *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala proves that not all monks are anti-*bhikkhunī* ordination. In his interview with Salgado, he pointed out that the benefit of the higher ordination for women is to help Buddhist nuns to gain ‘proper status’ in society, and the granting of ‘befitting status’ to women might help to resolve some problems faced by the nuns (Salgado 2000b: 38).

According to my informants, prior to 2000, the Board of Sri Lanka Bhikshuni Order (an organization associated with Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center) held the higher ordination three times a year, but since 2000, the organization holds the higher ordination only once every June. To receive the *bhikkhunī* ordination, a nun must be ordained as a *sāmanerī* for at least three years, have passed the three months of training at the Center and display good knowledge and discipline in Dharma. After

receiving the *bhikkhunī* ordination, the nuns must immediately go into retreat in their nunneries for another three months. At the time of my visit in April 2002, 198 nuns had received the *bhikkhunī* ordination from the Board of Sri Lanka Bhikshuni Order while twelve *sāmanerī* were under training for the upcoming *bhikkhunī* ordination. It is noteworthy that all the *bhikkhunī* preceptors at the higher ordination provided by the Board of Sri Lanka Bhikshuni Order are Sri Lankans. According to the Vinaya, a *bhikkhunī* preceptor must be a *bhikkhunī* for a minimum of twelve years (for details, see Wijayaratna 2001: 30–62) and since the *bhikkhunī* order is fairly new in Sri Lanka, no Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* could meet this requirement. To solve this problem, leading monks (*Mahā sangha*) granted eleven out of the original twenty *bhikkhunī* ordained in 1998 the special rights to be *bhikkhunī* preceptors. As such, the *bhikkhunī* ordination given by the Board of Sri Lanka Bhikshuni Order can claim to be truly Theravāda and Sri Lankan.

To enter the training at the Center, a *sāmanerī* must be at least 21, healthy, with education to at least O level, and display good knowledge and discipline in Dharma. Because the *bhikkhunī* sangha is relatively new in Sri Lanka, it is not unusual that a disciple in a nunnery might have obtained the *bhikkhunī* status while her teacher remains a ten-precept nun. Such situations create a dilemma, for in accordance with Buddhist monastic hierarchy, a ten-precept nun has to pay homage to a *bhikkhunī*. To solve this dilemma, the Center would grant special permission to elderly ten-precept nuns the right to be trained for *bhikkhunī* ordination even if they do not meet the necessary requirements for admission. The training curriculum ranges from *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha*, *Cullavagga*, History of Buddhism to social service. Students at the Center are mostly attracted through its branch nunneries at the district level. Salgado records her visit to a full day of classes at the Center in August 1997 as follows:

A learned *bhikkhu* who visited the center each month to discuss the Pāli [*sutras*] with the *sāmanerīs* led the morning session. Sitting on a mat on the floor, on the same level as the *sāmanerīs*,<sup>16</sup> the monk conducted a discussion focusing on the exposition of the *Satipatthāna Sutta*. The [ten-precept nuns], who did not possess copies of the text (because texts and copies of *sutta* are expensive), took dictation from the monk in both Pāli and Sinhala. The *bhikkhu*'s use of gender-inclusive language in his Sinhala explanation of the Pāli text prompted me to question him after class. He confirmed that even though the Pāli *sutta* only used the male form (*so*) in referring to the mediator, he considered it more appropriate to use both the male and female pronouns in the Sinhala. In particular, the *bhikkhu*, speaking from his personal experience, impressed upon the *sāmanerīs* the necessity of giving highest authority to the Buddha's

teachings rather than to meditation instructors. Reminding them that no one taught Siddhārtha Gautama to attain enlightenment, he said that the [ten-precept nuns] themselves should not unquestioningly follow authority. In particular, he advised caution in accepting the authority structures of meditation centers, given that the meditation teacher was not necessarily an arahant.

(2000b: 35)

This account shows that Dambulla nuns have the support of at least some *bhikkhu* in their pursuit for higher ordination and education.

According to the nuns, the Board of Sri Lanka Bhikshunī Order has a system to oversee the behavior of its *bhikkhunī* members. When a complaint is made against a *bhikkhunī*, whether by the laity or by other members of sangha, the district office will carry out the initial investigation. If the problem cannot be solved by the district office, the complaint will be forwarded to the headquarters, where in accordance with the Vinaya, both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* councils will discuss the matter together and make a ruling.

Financial expense remains the major problem for the Center. Although the laity offers food-alms frequently, financial donation is scarce. At the beginning, the nun students were asked to give food-alms for at least one day per month. The original group of *bhikkhunī* gathered some money among themselves and set up a fund to meet the expenses at the Center. At the time of my visit in 2002, students at the Center were no longer required to give alms, but textbooks were still not provided, and the students must buy textbooks themselves.

The story of Dambulla Bhikkhunī Training Center is a story of Sri Lankan women struggling not only to seek their rights to live as fully-ordained sangha members but also struggling to preserve their Theravāda identity. Despite the various difficulties they face (e.g. financial hardship, the uncertainty of social acceptance of *bhikkhunī*, etc.) it is clear that ‘Dambulla nuns’ are determined to establish a Sri Lankan and Theravāda *bhikkhunī* sangha.

### Buddhist women in Taiwan<sup>17</sup>

As Table 4 shows, only about half of the population in Taiwan claims religious affiliations, with approximately 24 percent of the population *claiming* to be Buddhists. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Sri Lanka, where the government claims that the majority of its population is Buddhist (76.7 percent).<sup>18</sup> It is possible that those Taiwanese who do not claim religious affiliations are atheists. But it is more likely that it reflects the syncretic nature of Chinese religion, which blends symbols, rituals and doctrines from various religious systems together without making a distinction between one and another (Jordan and Overmyer 1986: 9). In other words, these who claim religious affiliations are these who make a conscious

Table 4 Statistics on religions in Taiwan (2002)

<i>Religions</i>	<i>Temples and churches</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Universities and colleges</i>	<i>Hospitals</i>	<i>Publishing houses</i>
Taoism	8,604	4,546,000	1	2	9
Buddhism	4,038	5,486,000	8	3	28
Yi Guan Dao	3,218	845,000		21	30
Protestantism	3,609	605,000	7	14	
Catholicism	1,135	298,000	3	11	9
Lord of Universe Church	53	260,000			2
Tian De Jiao	5	200,000			1
Li-ism	131	169,000			1
Syuan Yuan Jiao	21	150,000			1
Islam	6	53,000			
Tenrikyo	150	30,000			
Baha'i	13	16,000			1
Mahikarikyo	9	1,000			
Confucianism	170	14,000			
Hai Zih Dao	30	2,300			
Da Yi Jiao	1	300			1
Maitreya Great Tao	[...]	100,000			1
Zhonghua Sheng Jiao	5	1,400			1
Universe Maitreya Emperor Jiao	2	300			1
Huang Zhong	1	500			
Total	23,201	12,777,800	19	51	86

Source: Government Information Office: [http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5\\_gp/yearbook/P351.htm](http://www.gio.gov.tw/taiwan-website/5_gp/yearbook/P351.htm), accessed 23 May 2005.

selection for a separated religious system, and these who do not might be simply following the practices and beliefs of the religious synthesis in the Chinese culture. In fact, some argue that the majority of the population in Taiwan adhere to the syncretic religion (e.g. Chiu 1997).

Unlike Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Buddhism in Taiwan has a relatively short history. Buddhism probably came to Taiwan along with the migration of Han Chinese settlers. The exact day when the Han Chinese migration began is hard to determine, but the large scale of the migration began in the 1630s and increased rapidly after 1661 as the Ming loyalists, who expelled the Dutch colonists in 1661, fled the Manchu invasion in China and migrated to Taiwan.<sup>19</sup> Jones points out that as a frontier society, religion in Taiwan displays characteristics of continuities and discontinuities. That is, while the Chinese migrants tried to recreate a life similar to the one in their homeland, the geographic and social distance between the frontier Taiwan and mainland China made the exact replicate of a religious life difficult. Adding to that, many temples in Taiwan were built by people with minimal knowledge of their religion, and without much involvement of religious professionals, the exact replicate of the religious life on the mainland was difficult to achieve (Jones 1999: 4–9). Hence, how many and what form of Buddhist worshiping places had appeared in Taiwan during the early period is uncertain, but it is certain that during the Zheng dynasty (1661–1683), the construction of Buddhist monasteries had taken place. Despite the absence of chronicle data, history nevertheless records six eminent Buddhist teachers during the Zheng dynasty and one of them was a laywoman:

Daughter of Prince Ru of Ming dynasty, she was intelligent, erudite in classics, and skilled in embroidery. . . . After the death of her husband, she moved to Taiwan to live on the subsidy of Prince Ningjing. At her old age, she lived alone and held vegetarian diet. Those near her respected her highly and venerated her as their women teacher.

(quoted in Kuangyu 1979: 12)

It seems that Buddhism in Taiwan during the earlier periods deviated considerably from Orthodox Chinese Buddhism. By ‘Orthodox Chinese Buddhism’, I refer to the monastic form of Buddhism that follows the Vinaya-based monasticism (though not without Chinese adaptation; for more, see Yifa 2002), observes vegetarianism, recognizes the authority of the Chinese state-approved edition of the *Tripitaka* and mainly of Han Chinese culture. The term ‘Orthodox Chinese Buddhism’ is certainly ambiguous considering that Buddhism has always been under transformation. But it seems that certain practices such as divination, *feng shui*, communicating with spirit (Welch 1967: 121–126) and the chanting of non-*Tripitaka sūtras* (Shi Dongchu 1979: 108–109) are generally regarded as heterodox. It also has been



noted that ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’ in Chinese religions is not defined by doctrines but by the state (Ding 2004: 181–187, 355). Since Buddhist discourse in postwar Taiwan had for a long time been dominated by the quasi-authority Buddhist organization, BAROC (more details later), it is the monastic form of Chinese Buddhism propagated by BAROC that is referred to as ‘Orthodox Chinese Buddhism’ in this book.

The fact that the mainstream Buddhism in Taiwan during the early periods was not of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism is evident from a survey conducted by the Japanese colonial administration in 1919, which indicates that the mainstream form of Buddhism in Taiwan at the time was a form of lay Buddhism called *zhaijiao* (Yao 1996: 73). *Zhaijiao* literally means ‘vegetarian teaching’ and is often translated into English as ‘vegetarian sect’. There are three main *zhaijiao* sects in Taiwan: the Longhua sect, the Jinchuang sect and the Xiantian sect. Their doctrines and practices may vary, but they all trace their origin to a Patriarch Luo, a popular religious sect leader active in Northern China during the early sixteenth century,<sup>20</sup> and their core beliefs all circle around the idea of the Unborn Venerable Mother (*Wusheng Laomu*) (Jones 1999: 14–29, 88–92). According to *zhaijiao* cosmology, all creatures in the universe are her children, and in order to relieve her children from suffering, she has sent numerous sages and Buddhas to the Earth (Zheng 1998: 41–43). It is interesting to note that *zhaijiao* women of Xiantian sect are similar to the ten-percepts nuns in Sri Lanka, for they both enter non-Vinaya-based nunhood and live in a celibate monastic lifestyle. Even though members of *zhaijiao* may perceive themselves as Buddhists and their religion as a form of ‘lay Buddhism’ (see, for example, the ethnographic study of a contemporary *zhaijiao* organization by Lin and Zu 1994) because of the mixture of various religious elements in *zhaijiao*, scholars debate over whether *zhaijiao* can be seen as Buddhism. Nonetheless, there seems to be little doubt that during the earlier periods, *zhaijiao* played a more influential role for Taiwanese women than Orthodox Chinese Buddhism (Shi Huiyan 1999: 262).

Table 5 Buddhist traditions in Taiwan

	<i>Vegetarian diet</i>	<i>Celibacy</i>
[Orthodox Chinese Buddhism	Yes	Yes]
<i>Zhaijiao</i> Xiantian sect	Yes	Yes
Longhua sect	Not strictly	No
Jinchuang sect	Yes	No
Japanese Buddhism	No	No

Source: Shi, Jianye 1999: 20.



For the interest of this research, it is worthwhile to note that while the large-scale of Vinaya-based nunhood probably did not exist in Taiwan until the mid-twentieth century (Jiang 2000: 117) the presence of large numbers of female renunciants had surfaced during the Japanese colonial period (Shi Huiyan 1999: 263) and continued to characterize Taiwanese Buddhism<sup>21</sup> up until this day.

After the end of the Second World War, Taiwan was given to the Chinese Nationalist regime (KMT), who later retreated to Taiwan after the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949. And for decades to come, Buddhist discourse in postwar Taiwan was controlled by the Buddhist Association of the Republic of China (BAROC), a Buddhist organization that had close ties with the KMT regime (Jones 1999: 97–105; Laliberté 2003: 159–163). Monks associated with BAROC sought to eradicate what they saw as heterodox practices, and one way to do it was to install the Vinaya-based, Chinese Buddhist monasticism on the island. In 1953, the first postwar transmission of higher ordination was carried out in Daxian Temple in southern Taiwan, organized by BAROC. It must be noted that until 1989, BAROC was the only organization permitted to give the higher ordination (Jones 1999: 181–183). For many years, this 1953 ordination was said to be the first higher ordination in Taiwan. However, temple records found by Shi Huiyan show that the higher ordination in Taiwan can be traced back to as early as 1919 (1999: 262). I do not know whether the higher ordinations during the Japanese colonial period were unintentionally forgotten or intentionally unrecognized. Since some of preceptors of the higher ordinations during the Japanese colonial period were Japanese monks (Shi Huiyan 1999: 258–259) these ordinations may be seen as ‘heterodox’ or ‘illegitimate’ in the eyes of Orthodox Chinese Buddhists. Notably, women began to outnumber men in receiving the higher ordination from 1924 onward (see Shi Huiyan 1999: 262). Probably as an outcome of promoting Orthodox Chinese Buddhist monasticism, Orthodox Chinese Buddhist nunhood has replaced *zhaijiao* nunhood as the predominant Buddhist nunhood in contemporary Taiwan.

It is worthwhile to note that Buddhist discourse in Taiwan since the 1980s is dominated by a ‘social-welfare orientation’ characteristic, a consequence of the influence of the ideology of ‘Buddhism for the human realm’ (*renjian fojiao*) (Wang 1995). ‘Buddhism for the human realm’ is itself a continuity of the Buddhist reform movement in China that began around the turn of the twentieth century and is the influence of reformist Buddhist monastics who fled to Taiwan after the Communist takeover in 1949 (Birnbbaum 2003; Pittman 2001). To understand the expansion of ‘Buddhism for the human realm’, it is essential to learn about *bhikkhu* Yinshun (1906–2005).<sup>22</sup> Built on the teachings of the earlier scholar monk *bhikkhu* Taixu and his idea of ‘Buddhism for human life’ (*rensheng fojiao*), *bhikkhu* Yinshun developed the philosophy of ‘Buddhism for the human realm’, which

emphasizes the role of humanity in Buddhism (Yang 1991: 183–194). That is, ‘Buddhism for the human realm’ argues that Buddhists should not focus on the theistic and mythic aspects of Buddhism such as the afterlife or Pure Land, but on the affairs in this very human realm. Accordingly, Buddhists are urged to apply the Buddha’s teachings and the *Bodhisattva* principle in the daily life such as in engaging in social welfare (Jiang 2000: 133; Jones 1999: 124–134).

Although Buddhism in contemporary Taiwan may be primarily Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, the popularity of both Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhism has been growing. Among Buddhist nuns of non-Orthodox Chinese tradition, the most famous one is perhaps *bhikkhuni* Juezhū Dengpai (1903–1997) of Tibetan tradition, better known as ‘Elder Gong Ge’. Granddaughter to a Qing imperial prince, she abandoned her marriage soon after the wedding, spent some years wandering around China and conducting educational projects for children living in poverty. At the outbreak of the Sino–Japanese war, she formed her own guerrilla troop and led guerrilla warfare against the Japanese. She began her spiritual practice in Tibetan Buddhism around 1939, which led to three years of meditation retreat in a mountain cave. She migrated to Taiwan in 1958, becoming one of the earliest preachers of Tibetan Buddhism in Taiwan. After her death in 1997, her body was mummified and has since become a popular shrine.<sup>23</sup>

Although Buddhism in Taiwan has changed a great deal since its arrival in the seventeenth century, one characteristic remains: the numerical dominance of Buddhist nuns. To my knowledge, there has not been a systematic study on the reason for the numerical dominance of female renunciants during the early periods. But it is certain that Buddhist nuns in Taiwan continue to greatly outnumber monks at the dawn of the twenty-first century. When speaking of the decline of the number and quality of Taiwanese Buddhist monks, Charles Jones warns, ‘It is clear that Taiwan’s Buddhists need to find ways to address these trends, or face an ever more serious decline in the order of monks’ (1999: 156). Regardless of whether such statements are exaggerated, it is certain that Taiwanese Buddhist nuns greatly outnumber monks: approximately 70–75 percent of Buddhist monastics in Taiwan are nuns. Many of these women have tertiary education (Li 2000a), and many hold high social esteem. The following three case-studies illustrate the experience of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns.

### *Bhikkhuni Cheng-Yen*<sup>24</sup>

A business magazine in Taiwan, *Tianxia Zazhi*, conducted an island-wide survey in 2001.<sup>25</sup> On the question of ‘who is the most beautiful person in Taiwan’, the one at the top of the list was not a movie star nor a supermodel, but a fragile, elderly Buddhist nun, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen. It was for her compassion that the survey’s respondents chose her as the most

beautiful person. Undoubtedly, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen is the best-known Buddhist nun in Taiwan.

Born in 1937 in central Taiwan, and then named Wang Jinyun, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen was adopted by a relative at a young age. Although she is very much a contemporary person, the common version of her life story is highly mystified. Most notable is the reported association between her and *Bodhisattva* Guanyin.<sup>26</sup> There is a story of how she was comforted by the story of *Bodhisattva* Guanyin while seeking shelter from the Allied bombing during the Second World War (see Qiu 1996: 12). Another story tells how Guanyin healed her adopted mother's illness during her teens (Qiu 1996: 11–15). Both hint at a strong association between *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen and *Bodhisattva* Guanyin.

After the end of the war, the family became affluent through a cinema franchise and, being the oldest child in the family, Wang Jinyun was an important assistant to her father in the management of the business. Perhaps the earlier experience of working in the cinema franchise provided her with the skills for the management of the multinational organization, Tzu Chi, which she would later lead. In 1960, her father unexpectedly passed away, with a stroke. Wang Jinyun blamed herself for his death, and began to have the thought of renunciation. In the following autumn, she and a Buddhist nun, *bhikkhuni* Xiudao, ran away together from their home town, in search of a life of spiritual practice. As the story goes, they eventually arrived at Hualien, an isolated and undeveloped town in Eastern Taiwan and stayed in a small temple there. Although *bhikkhuni* Xiudao eventually had to return to her home temple because of ill health, and Mrs Wang later found out her daughter's whereabouts and begged her to return home, Wang Jinyun's determination to pursue a spiritual life was strong. She shaved her head and put on nun's robes (Qiu 1996: 16–33).

The influence of *bhikkhuni* Xiudao on Wang Jinyun is significant: she had studied in Japan and was very critical of some common practices in Taiwanese Buddhism at the time (e.g. helping the laity to pray for material gain). It is likely that *bhikkhuni* Xiudao's criticism of material pursuit had a profound impact on *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen, for she became adamant about ascetic practice.

In 1963, Wang Jinyun heard about an upcoming ordination in Taipei. She left Hualien for the ordination. However, because she was not ordained properly and had no monastic teacher, she was refused entry to the formal ordination. Disappointed, she went shopping at a Buddhist bookshop before returning to Hualien. At the moment when she was about to pay for a book, the eminent monk, *bhikkhu* Yinshun walked in. Instantaneously, Wang Jinyun felt a strong inclination towards him and wished to be his disciple. Much to everybody's surprise, *bhikkhu* Yinshun agreed. He took Wang Jinyun in as a disciple and gave her the Dharma name, Cheng-Yen. This enabled her to be enrolled for the upcoming ordination (Qiu

1996: 40–41). The fact that the eminent monk agreed to take the unknown nun, whom he had only just met, as a disciple further mystifies the life story of *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen, for the story gives the relationship of two of the most influential players in Taiwanese Buddhism an unexplainable, mysteriously coincidental, beginning.

Even though the organization led by *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen came to be known primarily for its social service, that was not the first thing in her mind after the formal ordination. After the ordination, she returned to her small hermitage in rural Hualien, immersing herself in ascetic practices. Two events in 1966 changed her mind. The first was a visit to a private medical clinic, during which she was informed about how an aboriginal woman, after traveling a long distance from her village in the high mountains, was refused medical care because her family was unable to pay the deposit. The second event was a visit from three Catholic nuns who came to her hermitage with the purpose of converting her. The conversation with the Catholic nuns did not diminish her faith in Dharma. But the three Catholic nuns' mention of the social service provided by the Catholic Church sparked something in her mind. On the very same day of the Catholic nuns' visit, 14 April 1966, the Tzu Chi Merits Society (later renamed as the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Association) was founded (Qiu 1996: 51–76). *Bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen asked her followers, mostly housewives, to set aside NT \$0.5<sup>27</sup> from their grocery money every day and she collected the money to establish a charity fund. At the time of this research, Tzu Chi had become a household name in Taiwan.

In its first five years, Tzu Chi helped fifteen families, providing material as well as physical assistance to the needy. But what brought Tzu Chi to nationwide attention was its founding of a modern hospital. The idea of building a hospital came to mind in 1979. After suffering several severe health problems, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen realized the need to establish a permanent base in order for the charity service to continue in the event of her death. At that time, the Eastern coast lacked any modern facility to provide adequate medical care. Therefore, not surprisingly, the founding of a modern hospital in Hualien received enthusiastic endorsements from many in Taiwan, and brought Tzu Chi to nationwide attention. Tzu Chi Hospital, a five-storey building with 250 beds, opened on 3 August 1986. The establishment of the hospital was a significant step for Tzu Chi to expand beyond the boundary of Hualien, as the financial founding of the hospital and its medical personnel came from every corner of Taiwan. Today, Tzu Chi has become a multinational non-profit organization. It claims over four million members worldwide, with its franchise expanding to include a university, nursing college, TV station, etc. Its activities, now extended from medical care to environmental conservation, bone-marrow donation and disaster relief, can be found around the globe: from Taiwan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, mainland China, and Mongolia to Afghanistan, Turkey, Ethiopia, and so

on.<sup>28</sup> *Bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen herself was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1996.

Scholars agree that the success of Tzu Chi mainly relies on the personal charisma of *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen (e.g. Jiang 2000: 95; Jones 1999: 208). First, being an eloquent speaker in Hokkien Taiwanese, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen makes a strong appeal to the native Taiwanese, who in fact compose the majority of Tzu Chi membership. Yet, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen's careful avoidance of political issues and her insistence that Tzu Chi members must shun political activities creates a social space for the affluent middle class to pursue an elite status (by engaging in social service) without entangling in any potentially controversial politics (Huang and Weller 1998: 391–392). Thus, Tzu Chi provides a 'safe zone' for the newly emerged middle class to assure their elite status and social influence. Secondly, there is no question about her personal moral integrity for, to this day, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen and her monastic disciples still live an ascetic lifestyle. They refuse to live on the laity's donation, and their livelihood relies merely on the income generated from their handicraft works (Jiang 2000: 96; Jones 1999: 210).

Thirdly, as I have noted, there seems to be a subtle, if not unconsciously constructed, association created for *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen with *Bodhisattva* Guanyin. The striking resemblance in the life story of *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen and other female deities in popular Chinese religion (that is, various virgin goddesses) is apparent in many ways, especially that they all refuse marriage and devote their lives to the well-being of others (Huang and Weller 1998: 381–382). Although, judging from her teachings, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen herself shuns the idea of magic or miracle, her adherents mystify her, attributing various healing experiences to her (Guo 1996: 59). DeVido also notices that Tzu Chi carefully promotes and reproduces the notion of feminine nature as self-sacrificing and compassionate, and associates motherly love with *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen (2004). Given that *Bodhisattva* Guanyin is one of the most popular deities in Taiwan (Chiu 1997: 607–612), the association between *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen and Guanyin would, perhaps unconsciously, work to increase her popularity. As *Bodhisattva* Guanyin is viewed as the manifestation of love and compassion (Ichimura 2001) this association enhances the benevolent image of *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen and Tzu Chi. According to Barbara Reed, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen does not use the image of *Bodhisattva* Guanyin as a mere passive model:

[Cheng-Yen] has also been known to use what I would call 'Guanyin counternarratives'. She has explicitly rejected the idea that one might call on Guanyin for help; rather, one must help oneself and others. . . . For [Cheng-Yen], the point was to imitate Guanyin's compassion and perseverance. She said when she founded the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation, 'We will become

Guanyin's watchful eyes and useful hands, and the world can never call us Buddhists a passive group again.'

(Reed 2003: 198–199)

Finally, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen's charisma arises from her simple and yet practical teachings. *Bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen is not a scholarly nun, and her teachings are 'a blend of Confucianism and Buddhism, the traditional and the modern' (Jones 1999: 213). Seldom cited from Buddhist *sūtra*, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen's teachings centered on social problems, real experiences of the members and practical actions. 'Go see the poor' and 'Just do it' are two pieces of advice that she gives most often (Huang and Weller 1998: 384; Lu 1999). Without giving any complicated philosophical discourse, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen's teachings are simple and 'doable' and thus can be easily understood and followed by anyone.

Although Tzu Chi is led by a Buddhist nun, it is important to note that by and large it is a lay organization. Its monastic order has no symbolic purpose (Jones 1999: 212). Despite the insignificance of monasticism in Tzu Chi ideology, what I witnessed in the post-Sakyadhita conference temple tour to Tzu Chi headquarters in 2002 convinced me that perhaps *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen could still be a symbol or inspiration of empowerment for Buddhist nuns. Upon meeting *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen, a Western nun burst into tears, for she was 'moved by Ven. Cheng-Yen's compassion'. And a South Asian nun kept exclaiming to me, 'All of these under a *bhikkhuni*? All of these under a *bhikkhuni*?' Her astonishment at *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen's achievement reveals that simply by being an example, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen could be an inspiration of Buddhist nuns' empowerment. As such, her input to Buddhist nuns' welfare differs from that of *bhikkhuni* Kusuma. *Bhikkhuni* Kusuma is a highly-educated, scholarly nun who earnestly and consciously engaged herself in the improvement of Buddhist nuns' welfare in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen remains somehow distant from issues that concerned Buddhist nuns, but the success of Tzu Chi makes her a good example of what a Buddhist nun is capable of achieving (at least in temporal terms).

### *Luminary nuns*

While the success of Tzu Chi highlights the potential of what a Buddhist nun might be able of achieving, the case of 'Luminary nuns' (*xianguang ni*) illustrates the efforts of Buddhist nuns in pursuing empowerment. The Luminary Temple<sup>29</sup>/Luminary Buddhist Institute is situated in a remote village in Southern Taiwan, but its reputation has spread throughout the whole island. Throughout my Taiwanese fieldwork, the phrase, 'Luminary nuns', was frequently mentioned, and it seemed to be synonymous with the image of the well-educated and well-disciplined Buddhist nuns. Unlike the



case of Tzu Chi, of which the founder/leader *bhikkhunī* Cheng-Yen radiates like a superstar, 'Luminary nuns' are usually mentioned as a group without specific attention to a particular member (Ding 1996: 21).

The Luminary Buddhist Institute began as a simple worshipping place for rural villagers. In the mid-nineteenth century, a Guanyin statue worshipped in a villager's home was rumored to be performing miracles. The fame spread, and other villagers expressed the wish to worship the Guanyin. Hence, a temple was built for the Guanyin worship. Subsequent earthquakes destroyed the original temple, and from 1943 until the construction of a concreted building in 1972, the Guanyin statue was worshipped in villagers' homes by turns. In 1973, the temple, then named 'Jinlan Temple', was formally registered with the government for the first time. According to the website of the Luminary Buddhist Institute, the villagers thought that it would be more appropriate for a temple to be headed by a monastic. Hence, a petition was sent to BAROC, and it recommended *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi to be the abbess and administrator of Jinlan Temple. It seemed that the adherents of Jinlan Temple were unaware of the difference between popular/local religion and Buddhism, for to this day, some villagers would still come to the temple to conduct non-Buddhist rituals. However, *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi was educated in Orthodox Chinese Buddhism and she intended to promote a more constructive role for Orthodox Chinese Buddhism. First, with the consent of the adherents, *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi changed the name of the temple into 'Luminary', a term abstracted from the Buddhist *Lankavatara Sūtra*. This symbolic move signifies the beginning of the transformation from a local worshipping place to an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist temple. Secondly, she began to purchase the temple property from the villagers for the sangha. Even though by the time of my fieldwork in 2001, the sangha had not acquired the entire temple property, the sangha's ownership of at least part of the temple property secures the sangha's presence in the temple.

Although *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi initiated the transformation of the temple, she did not stay there long. In 1979, *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin succeeded as the abbess of Luminary Temple. *Bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin and *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi were classmates at Buddhist college and shared similar ideals. She was equally determined to spread the 'Right Dharma' to a village where it was absent. *Bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin's renovation of the temple had a profound impact on the welfare of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns.

However, to understand their renovation works, one must first learn about *bhikkhunī* Tianyi (1924–1980), for *bhikkhunī* Xinzhi was her direct disciple and *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin once studied under her. Born to a wealthy merchant family, *bhikkhunī* Tianyi had the rare opportunity to obtain a university education in Japan (Komazawa University) at a time when even secondary education was rare for Taiwanese girls. Her unusually high education was noticed by BAROC and she was asked to be the translator

(from Mandarin to Hokkien Taiwanese) for pre-ordination precept training. Gradually, she took over the task of precept training. Perhaps due to this background, *bhikkhunī* Tianyi, and now 'Luminary nuns', are renowned for being well-disciplined. A Taiwanese nun informant once jokingly told me that her temple disliked offering overnight stays to Luminary nuns, because Luminary nuns were 'too strict' on precepts. Whether she herself was conscious of it, in my opinion, *bhikkhunī* Tianyi embarked on the feminist reconstruction of the Buddhist nuns' order. It is evident in *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin's summary of *bhikkhunī* Tianyi's teachings:

1. Women must be taught by women themselves!
2. *Bhikkhunī* must stand up and must have the ability to solve problems by themselves. *Bhikkhunī* cannot leave difficult challenges to male sangha to solve. This is an attitude that must be established first.
3. 'Sangha problems must be solved within the sangha', so '*bhikkhunī* problems must be solved by *bhikkhunī*'. If *bhikkhunī* cannot solve their own problems, it is impossible to speak of *bhikkhunī* as religious professionals. This is the idea she emphasized. For, a *bhikkhunī* should not expect outside help or other people to solve her problem. *Bhikkhunī* must be self-reliant and independent. If *bhikkhunī* cannot even solve their own problems, it is impossible for *bhikkhunī* to stand up.

(quoted in Shih Jianye 1999: 149–150)

This summary shows a clear and conscious intention to pursue Buddhist nuns' empowerment. Although *bhikkhunī* Tianyi died before the political context allowed Taiwanese Buddhism to express itself freely, her influence on Luminary nuns and their transformation for the *bhikkhunī* sangha is apparent.

Above all else, the Luminary Buddhist Institute is known for its education for Buddhist nuns, which is attributed largely to *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin's efforts. Even though at the time that *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin became the abbess of Luminary Temple, the number of Buddhist nuns already exceeded Buddhist monks in Taiwan, Buddhist nuns mostly played secondary roles in sangha and rarely was a *bhikkhunī* educated enough to preach Dharma. According to its website, the Luminary Buddhist Institute was founded in 1980 for the purpose of reconstructing the image of *bhikkhunī*, by enhancing the educational opportunities for Buddhist nuns and finding more up-to-date methods to spread Dharma. It is a Buddhist college specifically for the nuns and open to all Buddhist nuns including those who are not members of the Luminary sangha. Luminary Temple was thus transformed from a popular/local religious temple for the laity into an educational place for Buddhist nuns (Ding 1996: 27–29).



The Luminary Temple/Luminary Buddhist Institute may be located in a remote, agricultural-based village, but its influence spreads well beyond the village. Not only do its monastic members and lay devotees mainly come from areas outside of the village, but also it does not limit its activities to within the village boundary. For example, in order to acquire up-to-date knowledge of management, the current abbess, *bhikkhuni* Mingjia, was sent to study an MBA degree in the USA before taking up the post. The list of instructors at the Luminary Buddhist Institute includes many who have postgraduate qualifications from overseas as well as from Taiwan. Since its instructors come from a wide range of educational backgrounds, the sangha may encounter different ideas.<sup>30</sup>

However, what makes the Luminary Buddhist Institute renowned is its aim to offer strict and traditional sangha training on the basis of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism. To begin with, the schedule at the institute is based on the traditional Chinese monastic model, with a fixed timetable for waking-up, chanting, working, studying, meditating, etc. (Ding 1996: 34–35). In order to train nuns to be both capable of being Dharma preachers and running a temple independently, the curriculum at the institute includes Dharma doctrines, rituals, speech skills and temple tasks, so that the students may not only learn about Dharma but also practical skills in mundane affairs.

Training at the institute is divided into three levels: basic (three years), advanced (two years), and postgraduate. For the purpose of training nun students in sangha disciplines, all students must begin at the basic level, regardless of their level of secular education.<sup>31</sup> Yet, Luminary nuns do not shy away from the lay community. Luminary branch centers throughout Taiwan provide various social services to the laity, such as Dharma study, meditation classes, prison counseling, children/youth summer camps, language classes for ‘foreign brides’, etc.

As much as the Luminary Buddhist Institute is now renowned for providing Buddhist nuns with high quality training in Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, the transformation of Luminary Temple from a popular/local religious temple to an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist temple has yet to be completed. When one enters Luminary Temple, he/she might be surprised by its colorful roofs and the heavy incense-burning Buddha Hall, features that are associated more with a popular/local religion than Buddhism. Out of respect for the villagers’ religion, Luminary nuns also give consent to villagers’ non-Buddhist rituals, such as theater performance in the temple grounds, the procession of Guanyin statue around the village, ghost worship, etc. (Ding 1996: 26). This gives Luminary Temple an interesting mixture of the characteristics of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism and local religious cults. In some villagers’ minds, Luminary Temple still belongs to them since it began as a communal worshipping place. Potential conflict in the transformation erupted in 1996 when a group of villagers attempted to expel the nuns and

take over the temple. Because the sangha owns the majority of the temple property, the court ruled in the sangha's favor.<sup>32</sup>

To my knowledge, Luminary nuns do not employ feminist language nor fashion themselves as feminists. Thus, the significance of 'Luminary nuns' in regard to Buddhist nuns' welfare lies not in the language that they could have employed but in the actions that they have undertaken. *Bhikkhuni* Tianyi's call for *bhikkhuni* to 'stand up' and the high quality of training for nuns at the institute have both actualized the Buddhist nuns' empowerment. As much as Luminary nuns try to live according to Buddhist precepts, which might subjugate the nuns to monks, Luminary nuns are able to maneuver within the limitations of the precepts to establish financial and institutional independence away from the male sangha. Judging from the information provided by my Luminary nun informants and *bhikkhuni* Wu-Yin's book, *Choosing Simplicity: commentary on the bhikshuni pratimoksha* (2001), the role of monks in relation to Luminary nuns seems largely to be that of instructors rather than leaders.

However, the Luminary Buddhist Institute is not unique in its goal of improving educational opportunities for Buddhist nuns. Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center in Sri Lanka is also an educational institution founded by Buddhist nuns for Buddhist nuns. In fact, the Luminary Buddhist Institute and Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center exhibit strong resemblances: both realize the need to provide Buddhist nuns with better training in Dharma doctrine and in the practical skills of running a temple independently; both are located in rural villages and yet open to new ideas from outside. The interviews and conversations I had with nuns at both institutions convinced me that they evinced the same spirit and determination to pursue Buddhist nuns' welfare. Yet, measured by their scale and material attainment, Luminary Buddhist Institute seems to fare better than Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center, which was still struggling with its financial sources at the time of my fieldwork in 2002. Such a difference perhaps should be attributed to the difference in the larger economic situations in Taiwan and Sri Lanka (see Table 1). It is perhaps easier for the Luminary Buddhist Institute to attract lay monetary donations than Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center. As the consequence, the Luminary Buddhist Institute would enjoy better material attainment than Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center.

While the Luminary Buddhist Institute reminds me of Sri Sanghāmittā Education Center in Sri Lanka, the next case study shows exchanges between Buddhists in Taiwan and Sri Lanka.

### *Foguangshan*

A case study of Foguangshan was not planned initially. But as I heard mention, again and again, of 'Foguangshan' throughout my Sri Lankan fieldwork, it became apparent to me that it might be appropriate to offer a

case study on Foguangshan. Although my decision arises from its connection with the reestablishment of the *bhikkhuni* order in Sri Lanka, being one of the largest sangha in Taiwan, Foguangshan is significant in its own right. At the time of writing, Foguangshan has over 200 branch temples worldwide and members from Asia, Africa, America and Europe.<sup>33</sup> The activities of Foguangshan range widely, from Buddhist colleges, to multi-discipline universities, publishing houses and charitable programs. The backbone ideology of Foguangshan claims to be Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*), or translated as ‘Buddhism for the human realm’,<sup>34</sup> which has become one of the most popular Buddhist ideologies in Taiwan since the late twentieth century.

A discourse on Foguangshan can hardly forgo a discourse on its founder, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun.<sup>35</sup> Born in Southern China in 1927, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun entered the Buddhist order at the age of twelve and was educated at the renowned reformist Buddhist institute, Chiao-Shan Buddhist College. Under the influence of Buddhist reformists, he is said to have vowed to espouse Humanistic Buddhism from a young age. As the Chinese civil war waged on, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun fled to Taiwan in 1949. But he and some other mainland monks were imprisoned soon after arriving in Taiwan on the mere suspicion of spying for the Chinese Communists. After being released from prison, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun was invited by lay devotees to a rural county in Northern Taiwan, where he founded his own sangha. In 1967, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun obtained a parcel of land in the Southern county of Kaoshiung and moved his sangha there. That parcel of land in Kaoshiung eventually became the home base of the now vast, thoroughly internationalized Foguangshan.<sup>36</sup>

According to Jiang, the rapid rise of Foguangshan is largely due to the entrepreneurial and organizational genius of *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun. His impersonal management of the organization, clever business skill and ability to incite loyalty from his monastic disciples and the laity enables Foguangshan to grow rapidly (Jiang 2000: 77–90). In addition, the political and economic conditions in Taiwan during the later part of the twentieth century were favorable for various Buddhist organizations to expand, and Foguangshan was able to rise fast.

Foguangshan exhibits both unique and typical characteristics of Taiwanese sangha. It is unique because the scale of its vast organization, the depth of its internationalization and the articulation of its own brand of religious values is comparable only with very few sangha in Taiwan, so much so that Charles Jones calls Foguangshan a ‘new form of Chinese Buddhist sectarianism’ (1999: 191–198). Foguangshan is a typical Taiwanese sangha because it is a sangha founded by a monk, but consisting of both male and female members and with the number of female members greatly exceeding the male. A Taiwanese informant said to me, ‘Haven’t you heard of “the five dragons of Foguangshan”? Without these five dragons,

Foguangshan would be nothing'. The 'five dragons' refer to the five senior *bhikkhuni* disciples of *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yu: Cizhuang, Cijia, Cirong, Ciyi, and Cihui. This informant is a woman. It is interesting to note that while male scholars such as Jiang (2000) and Jones (1999) mention nothing about the *bhikkhuni*'s contribution, my female, non-intellectual informant attributed the success of Foguangshan not to *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun, but to his senior *bhikkhuni* disciples. According to my informant, it was due to those five *bhikkhuni*'s diligent works, well-connected social network and skillful management that Foguangshan succeeds. In other words, the success of Foguangshan is closely dependent on its female members.

Women have played a crucial role in the development of Foguangshan since its earliest days. To begin with, it was Madame Zhang Qingyang, wife of the renowned General Sun Liren, who worked restlessly for the release of *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun and other mainland monks when they were wrongly imprisoned (Jiang 2000: 145–147). According to Lin Su-wen, *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun holds a relatively open attitude towards gender issues, and recognizes the efforts and ability of women, although he is not totally immune to the patriarchal values of his generation (2001: 248). Additionally, perhaps because of the complexity of running the vast organization, the organizational structure of Foguangshan is largely based on practical needs rather than the structural protocol that the Chinese monastic tradition might demand. For example, in terms of the sex ratio of senior posts, females outnumber males 4 or 5 to 1. Significant also is its abolishment of the Eight Special Rules. Except for the Vinaya precepts where the number of precepts is larger for nuns than monks, male and female members follow the same number of internal rules in Foguangshan (Lin 2001: 253–267).

Despite of its apparent success, Foguangshan is not without its critics in Taiwan. Taiwanese – Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike – often criticize it for being too commercialized and political. The sale of religious books, tapes, etc. by Foguangshan generates a great amount of wealth for the organization, and such behavior contradicts what is generally expected of monastics (that is, renouncing worldly belongings). Furthermore, in contrast to Tzu Chi, which deliberately avoids political activities, Foguangshan does not shy away from political involvement. It caused great controversy when *bhikkhu* Hsing-Yun openly supported one of the candidates at the 1996 Presidential Election (Jiang 2000: 80–81; Laliberté 2003: 169–171). As the 'abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm' ravaged on in Taiwan (Chapter 3), Foguangshan quickly involved itself in this controversy by openly giving support to the movement (Shi Zhaohui 2002). Thus it is clear that Foguangshan has become sensitive to gender issues in Buddhism and possibly been looking for a more influential role in the international scene of the Buddhist feminist movement. Given its financial strength and human resources, it is not surprising to find Foguangshan appearing in the scene of the international *bhikkhuni* movement.

Foguangshan was no stranger to the affairs of monastic ordination. As the passage of the Revised Law on Civic Organizations in 1989 opened the door for Buddhist organizations in Taiwan to conduct ordinations without the control of BAROC, Foguangshan quickly hosted a series of higher ordinations in its own right (Jones 1999: 189–190). Its attention soon turned to the international *bhikkhunī* movement. According to Dr Hema Goonatilake, the bridge between Foguangshan and the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka began in 1984 when she embarked on a lecture tour to Foguangshan: ‘I told them [members of Foguangshan] we gave you the *bhikkhunī* order. Now you must give us back what was given.’<sup>37</sup> It is possible that Dr Hema Goonatilake’s visit made known to Foguangshan what role it might play in the international *bhikkhunī* movement. Soon afterwards, in 1988, Foguangshan hosted a *bhikkhunī* ordination for nuns from various countries, including a delegation of ten Sri Lankan nuns, at its branch temple, His Lai Temple in California, USA (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 12–13). Since then, Foguangshan has been actively involved in the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

Foguangshan is an internationalized organization, for it has branch temples worldwide. Perhaps because Foguangshan’s branch temples provide services to meet the needs of local Chinese communities (that is, Chinese Buddhist rituals, Chinese language classes for children, reading groups, youth clubs, etc.) people who attend services at Foguangshan branch temples are not limited to those from Taiwan. Foguangshan’s branch temple in London, for instance, is dominated by ethnic Chinese from Malaysia. Nevertheless, as much as its branch temples are the places where ethnic Chinese from different backgrounds converge, Foguangshan has not yet extended its influence to outside of the Chinese community – with the possible exception of its African Buddhist Seminary (Clasquin 2002: 157). It is thus possible to interpret Foguangshan’s involvement with the international *bhikkhunī* movement as an organizational strategy to expand its influence beyond the Chinese community.

By the time of this research, Foguangshan has hosted three international *bhikkhunī* ordinations: the first one in Hsi Lai Temple in USA in 1988, in which five Sri Lankan nuns obtained the *bhikkhunī* ordination; in Bodhgaya, India in 1998, in which twenty Sri Lankan nuns obtained the *bhikkhunī* ordination, and finally in Foguangshan’s headquarters in Taiwan in 2000, in which twenty Sri Lankan nuns obtained the *bhikkhunī* ordination. It is important to note that Foguangshan was very careful in emphasizing the ‘international’ nature of these three *bhikkhunī* ordinations. In all three ordinations, *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* from various traditions and nationalities were invited to be instructors and preceptors. Given the concern of maintaining Theravāda identity in Sri Lanka, the emphasis on the ‘international’ nature of the ordination proves to be crucial for the nuns to be recognized as *bhikkhunī* in their home countries. According to *bhikkhunī*

Cheuhmen, the coordinator of Foguangshan's international ordination activities, Foguangshan does not 'abandon' these Sri Lankan nuns who received higher ordinations under its arrangements. Delegations of Foguangshan *bhikkhunī* would be sent to Sri Lanka at least twice a year to inspect the welfare of these nuns, and the establishment of a *bhikkhunī* training center in Sri Lanka was under consideration.<sup>38</sup> During my fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2002, I met four nuns who had received the higher ordination under Foguangshan. I talked with two of them, but I found it difficult to determine the impact of their *bhikkhunī* status upon their lives. Although those who were ordained earlier seemed to have encountered greater difficulty in the recognition of their *bhikkhunī* status (while the two who were ordained in 2000 seemed to enjoy better acceptance), they all claimed to have no regrets about receiving the *bhikkhunī* ordination.

### Summary

This chapter reveals that the experiences of Buddhist nuns in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan are closely interrelated with various contexts in which they are situated – political, historical, social, etc. For instance, the different political contexts that shape the emphasis on female ordination have led to different outcomes on Buddhist nunhood in the two countries. The six case studies also show that social and economic elements have great impact on the experience of nuns' sangha. Therefore, it seems safe to say that women's religious experience is highly influenced by these various contexts that they are in.

## Chapter 3

# SCRIPTURE ANALYSIS

This chapter and the next will analyze the results of my fieldwork, which I conducted in Taiwan and Sri Lanka from November 2001 to May 2002, through the methods of interview and questionnaire survey. Most of the research subjects were introduced to me through their associates or other informants. The questions that I asked were mostly based on the issues raised in Western feminist critiques on Buddhism. Though I had gone into the fieldwork with a set of questions and hypotheses, the questions and the analysis were modified throughout the research period as the result of fieldwork findings.

Twenty-six full interviews and seventy-four questionnaires were administered in Sri Lanka. The questionnaire was translated into Sinhala and given to the nuns with return envelopes and stamps. Some questionnaires were distributed by people who were enthusiastic to help, and some were given to the nuns after an interview. Some of the interviews were conducted in Sinhala through the help of a translator, and some were conducted in English. In my analysis, I will specify in which language an interview was conducted. Generally, an interview in English lasted longer than an interview in Sinhala, as an English interview allowed me to maneuver the process better and to discuss the issues in more depth. I will also specify the length of a nun's ordination in my analysis. In the case of Sri Lankan nuns, the number of ordination years indicates a nun's total length of nunhood, so if a nun had been a *bhikkhuni* for a year but had been a ten-precept nun for ten years prior to her *bhikkhuni* ordination, she will be noted as 'ordained for 11 years'.

Overall, I felt that my Sri Lankan research subjects were friendly, and welcomed my research. I experienced a great amount of hospitality in Sri Lanka. On the other hand, I experienced more hostility in my Taiwanese fieldwork. Some Taiwanese nuns were very defensive and reluctant to answer my questions. As the result of the hostility, only seventeen full Taiwanese interviews were conducted. All the Taiwanese interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The hostility I experienced in Taiwan is somehow



ironic, since I am Taiwanese myself. I suspect that the hostility towards my research that I found throughout my Taiwanese fieldwork might be result of the aftermath of 'the abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm' (see below), for many of my Taiwanese informants seemed to interpret my research as an aftermath of 'the storm'.

Some Taiwanese nuns and sangha refused my request for interviews and/or questionnaire surveys such as one of the largest sangha in Taiwan, Chungtaishan.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the lack of feminist consciousness in Taiwan and nuns' loyalty to their lineage may induce the nuns' unwillingness to voice challenge against teachings passed down from earlier generations (Li 2003: 507). I also suspect that Taiwanese nuns' hostility towards my research is related to the insider/outsider issue, crucial in the field of religious study (e.g. see McCutcheon 1999). Taiwanese nuns may have similar concerns – that I, an outsider of the experience of Buddhist nuns, may misrepresent their interests or misinterpret their experiences. Such a concern is not entirely groundless, considering how Western feminism has misrepresented and misinterpreted the discourse of Asian Buddhist women.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, I would argue that the hostility found in the Taiwanese fieldwork and the hospitality found in the Sri Lankan fieldwork is related to the nuns' access to self-representation, namely, the access to media. Religious use of media may take many forms, from religious arts and textual discourse to television, internet, etc., all for the purpose of propagating the religion (Arthur 2004). A glance at the six case studies in Chapter 2 reveals that information on the three Sri Lankan cases was gathered through interviews with the nuns, and information on the three Taiwanese cases came mainly from their websites. Although I visited all of the three Taiwanese sangha, the abundant information provided on their websites made it unnecessary to base the discourse of basic information (that is, history of the sangha) on the interviews. Many Taiwanese sangha have their newsletters and Internet websites. In other words, generally speaking, Taiwanese nuns are more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to represent themselves to a wider audience in their own words. Hence, there is less need for Taiwanese nuns to provide me with information about themselves. This might subsequently lead to hostility or reluctance towards becoming research subjects. On the other hand, Sri Lankan nuns have less access to the media, so research such as mine that could convey their interests to a wider audience is welcomed. The currently unfolding history of a Buddhist nuns' order in Sri Lanka might also contribute to Sri Lankan nuns' friendly reception towards my research, for Sri Lankan nuns might feel an urgency to make their opinions known. The different degree of access to self-representation may thus account for the different degree of hospitality that I experienced in my Taiwanese and Sri Lankan fieldworks.



Whatever the reason may be, I experienced the same hostility in the Taiwanese survey research as in the interview research. A total of 492 valid Taiwanese questionnaires were conducted. Of course, not all Taiwanese nuns were hostile to my research. For example, my research was welcomed at Foguangshan and by many other sangha/nuns. And there are at least seventeen returned questionnaires that were photocopied by nuns themselves and then sent back to me by post, indicating that some nuns were eager to help. Thus, despite the hostility I experienced with some Taiwanese nuns and sangha, there is no denying the enthusiastic support from others.

### Scriptural influence

Although the main thesis in the research is to examine the relationship between the social-economic conditions and the welfare of Buddhist nuns, I cannot deny the influence of scriptures on the actions of Buddhists (and therefore on the welfare of Buddhist nuns). In fact, much of scholarly discourse on Buddhism has been based on the perceived significance of scriptural authority. However, it is also important to note that a scripture does not simply exist in itself, and it requires an 'active, subjective relationship to persons, and as part of a cumulative communal tradition' for a text to become a scripture (Graham 1987: 5). As such, scriptures should be understood in a *relational* way in terms of how the adherents select and relate to their scriptures. Miriam Levering has analyzed the types of relationship between scriptures and religious adherents and concludes that four fundamental modes of reception make a text a scripture: informative, transactive, transformative, and symbolic (1989b: 60). Examples are many. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the common ritual, *pirit* (or *paritta* in Pāli), in which a group of *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī* recites certain *sūtra*, has a range of purposes – from exorcizing demons to giving blessings (De Silva 1974: 111–121; Rahula 1956: 278–280). In Taiwan, the very act of copying or reciting *sūtra* is considered as having the functions of generating merit, averting demons and meditating (Levering 1989b: 68–90). While the copying of *sūtras* in Theravāda Buddhism is also an important merit-making activity, it is less prominent than *paritta* chanting (Crosby 2003). Apparently, for Buddhists, scriptures are not merely containers of information.

For Buddhists, the authority of Buddhist scriptures lies in their claim to be the record of the Buddha's words, and Buddhist scriptures are related by Buddhists as the teacher of the community, the guidance to the adherents in the physical absence of the Buddha. It is recounted in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* that at his deathbed, the Buddha said to his senior disciple, Ānanda:

It may be, Ānanda, that some of you will think, ‘The word of the Teacher is a thing of the past; we have now no Teacher.’ But that, Ānanda, is not the correct view. The Doctrine and Discipline, Ānanda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone.

(*Mahāparinibbānasutta* (60), quoted from Lopez 1988: 1)

This statement addresses the dilemma of a religious community that was facing the question of authority in the absence of its founder, and it locates the authority of the religion in the words of the founder (Lopez 1988: 1). According to Buddhist canons, to ensure that the Buddha’s teachings would not be lost, a council of monks was gathered shortly after the Buddha’s *parinirāvana*, which is generally known as ‘the first council’ (Skilton 1994: 45–92; Robinson and Johnson 1997: 51–55). It is generally agreed that Buddhist scriptures were orally transmitted for centuries before being written down. Recent study suggests that Pāli/Theravāda *Tripitaka* was codified in the fifth century CE (Blackburn 2001: 25; Gombrich 1988: 153–155), and the compiling of Sanskrit texts of Mahāyāna scriptures occurred around the same time as the composition of Pāli/Theravāda scriptures (Lamotte 1988: 584–585). The transformation of Buddhism into a literary religion had profound consequences. For example, it is argued that in Buddhism, the writing down of texts and the subsequent emphasis on the study of texts reduced the emphasis on the spiritual insight of teachers and meditation experience of practitioners to a less prominent position in the religious discourse (Ray 1994: 15–32).

Furthermore, scholars notice that there is usually a gap between scholarly minded religious adherents and the practices and beliefs of religious adherents who are less scripturally inclined. The scripturally inclined adherents might be preoccupied with locating the ‘authentic teachings’ from the texts, maintaining the ‘purity’ of religious belief, etc., while those who are less scripturally inclined might be more concerned with the applicability of religious belief into their daily life than with the teachings in the texts (King 1999: 70). It is also argued that people who have access to the written word become the ones at the top of the religious hierarchy as they hold the power to interpret the religion on the basis of written scriptures, and people who do not have, or have less, access to scriptural study become religious masses and might formulate their religious practices and beliefs in adaptation to local culture (Sharot 2001). Hence, Buddhists who immerse in *sūtra* study might exhibit differences in their religious practices and beliefs from Buddhists who rarely engage in *sūtra* study. However, in Buddhism, the preservation of texts does not necessarily contradict ritual practices, for Buddhists who preserve texts are often highly respected ritual specialists.<sup>3</sup> It would be incautious to assume that Buddhists who do not spend time in studying, interpreting *sūtra*, know nothing about scriptures.

From a feminist perspective, a few problems exist in women's relationship with Buddhist scriptures. First, despite the fact that the order of nuns had already existed at the time, nuns were conspicuously absent in the story of the First Council, in which the foundation of Buddhist scriptures was laid. Regardless of the historicity of the First Council, the absence of nuns in the story indicates that Buddhist scriptures were possibly or mostly assembled by monks, with little input from the nuns. Moreover, as in the case of Pāli scriptures, of which the majority of known editors or translators are said to be monks (see Rahula 1956: xxi–xliii), in the case of Chinese Buddhist scriptures, nearly all known translators were also monks, who traveled, selected and translated the scriptures into Chinese (Heirman 2003). If all Buddhist scriptures were selected and written by men, androcentric characteristics might be (unconsciously) added into the scriptures. For instance, Serinity Young finds that different versions of the biography of the Buddha give women different degree of prominence in the stories. While the *Lalitavistara*, the work of anonymous compilers of oral stories about the Buddha, gives female characters positive and prominent roles to play, the *Buddhacarita*, the work of the monk Āśvaghosa, portrays women in a negative and insignificant way (Young 2004: 3–16). This difference indicates that an author's gender might influence the focus and theme of a text. Since the majority of known authors, editors and translators of Buddhist scriptures were male, the neglect of women's interests and/or experiences in the scriptures may not be unexpected.

Another problem is that throughout the major part of human history, only a minority of the population was literate, and the female population tended to be disproportionately illiterate. Since universal literacy only became a reality in recent years, the nuns in my 2001–2002 fieldwork were unique because they were the earliest generations of women in their countries when female literacy finally became virtually universal. However, the effect of universal female literacy on women's religious experience is yet to be studied, remembering that the Buddhist scriptures used in Sri Lanka and Taiwan are in languages unintelligible to today's average literate Sri Lankans and Taiwanese; that in Theravāda countries, Buddhist scriptures were traditionally learned through oral practices and memorization, and that Buddhists also recognize the authority of insights gained from other methods such as meditation. Recent research even raises questions challenging the notion that education automatically brings empowerment and autonomy to women (e.g. Malhotra and Mather 1997; Martin 1995). As such, the effect of literacy on women's relationship with scriptures needs even further investigation.

In fact, it is not women reading *per se* that empowers women, but feminist reading, as June O'Connor notes:

... being a woman is not sufficient to generate feminist knowledge. Feminist inquiry is work that must be learned, a mode of inquiry that requires a critical consciousness.

(1995: 57)

Accordingly, literate women who are likely to be aware of misogynous statements in scriptures may negotiate their responses on the basis of scriptural statements, which are held to be more authoritative than personal experiences. Illiterate women on the other hand are not confronted by this dilemma and may formulate their critiques on the basis of personal judgments. In other words, female universal literacy does not necessarily bring feminist influence to women's relationship with scriptures.

Though the nuns in my research are unique because they are the first generation of women in their countries when female universal literacy becomes a reality, the impact of female universal literacy on women's relationship with scriptures still requires further study. I will examine below three theories that are based primarily on scriptural discourse and often discussed by Western feminists in order to assess their applicability to the actual lives of Buddhist nuns.

### **Women's karma**

The first issue concerns women's merit, the idea that women have inferior karma to men. Rita Gross argues:

Given the way women were treated, such beliefs may have seemed quite empirical and reasonable – that old circle of self-justification for the status quo, in which it is argued that the way things are proves that they should be that way. Since women do not achieve much, generally speaking, they must have inferior karma, which justifies keeping them in institutional set-ups that limit them severely. In historical forms of Buddhism, this vicious circle operated by socializing women to believe that their spiritual capacities were limited and that their proper sphere was the relatively disvalued realm of reproduction and domestic labor.

(1993: 211)

In other words, as social injustice can be blamed on individuals' karma, the idea of women having inferior karma functions to keep women in 'their places', to maintain sexist practices in the society.

Indeed, much research finds that the idea of women having inferior karma has had a negative impact on the welfare of Buddhist nuns. For example, Kim Gutschow's study of a Tibetan Buddhist community in the

Indian Himalayas finds that the villagers tend to consider the monks' order as a higher 'field of merit' than the nuns' order and usually channel most of their donations and alms to the monks' order (2000: 111). The belief of women's inferior karma also deprives the nuns the chance to conduct many rituals. While the monks could rely on rituals to sustain their livelihood, the nuns are usually forced to perform manual labor in order to sustain their livelihood (for example, cultivating fields for the laity or the monks' order). As a result, not only may the nuns live in an impoverished condition, in contrast to the rich monastery of the monks, but also they may have little time outside of their labor work to pursue religious study (Gutschow 2004: 77–122). Furthermore, Kawanami finds that because of their ambiguous monastic status/non-Vinaya-based nunhood, Burmese eight-precept nuns feel less confident, not seeing themselves as a worthy 'merit field', in accepting lay donations (1990). Therefore, the idea of women having inferior karma, which leads to the idea that the monks' order is more worthy of donation than the nuns' order, may have contributed to the decline and the subsequent disappearance of the nuns' order in many countries. For example, the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim, *bhikkhu* I Ching, was impressed by the poor and simple life of the nuns in India, which was in sharp contrast to the richly endowed monasteries of the monks. It is possible that the idea of women's inferior karma led the laity to consider the nuns' order a lesser 'field of merit' than the monks' order and less willing to support the nuns. In times of difficulties, when the resources were limited, the laity might choose to support the higher 'field of merit' in order to generate more merit from the limited resources. Subsequently, the nuns' order might perish as a result of inadequate support (Falk 1989).

### *Scripture*

To the best of my knowledge, Pāli scriptures have little to say about women's inferior karma, but there exist indirect hints in Pāli scriptures that imply women's subjugation. For example, although the Pāli canon, the *Vimānavatthu*, astonishingly<sup>4</sup> contains more than half of the stories about women and the tales of women's attainment of spiritual goals – from which one might therefore anticipate an equalitarian attitude – it nevertheless includes statements that advocate female subordination (Egge 2002: 86–87). One example is the story of a goddess who tells the reasons for her heavenly rebirth, as follows:

When I was born a human being among men I was a daughter-in-law in a wealthy family. I was without anger, obedient to my husband, diligent on the Observance (days). When I was born a human being, young and innocent, with a mind of faith, I delighted

my lord. By day and by night I acted to please. Of old I was one of moral habit. Refraining from onslaught of creatures, not a thief, utterly pure in body I fared in chastity; not drinking liquor and not speaking lies, I was one who fulfilled the rules of training. On the fourteenth, fifteenth and eighth (days) of the bright fortnight and on a special day of the fortnight well connected with the eightfold (precepts) I observed the Observance day with a mind of faith, was one who was faring according to *Dharma* with zeal in my heart . . .

(*Vimānavatthu*, III 3(31)<sup>5</sup>)

Although her observance of *Dharma* in the previous life should account for the main reason for her heavenly rebirth, and the tale can be read to emphasize heavenly rebirth through righteous actions rather than female obedience, the story nevertheless encourages women's subordination since '[obedience] to my husband' is also a virtue that accounts for her heavenly rebirth. This story thus subjugates women to male authority, for it encourages women's unquestioned obedience to their husbands.

Another Pāli story associates the rebirth in heaven with the abandonment of femaleness:

After she had cultivated heart of amity for the sake of being reborn in Brahmā's world and had put away the thoughts of a woman, she became a denizen of the world of the Brahmās.

(*Petavatthu*, II 13 (19)<sup>6</sup>)

In this, 'the thoughts of a woman' is used as a metaphor for a negative psychological state, which must be avoided in order to gain higher rebirth. This story undoubtedly puts women in a negative light, since 'the thoughts of a woman' is said to be an obstacle to higher rebirth. It tells women to be ashamed of themselves and suggests the obstructive nature of being women. Therefore, without directly stating that women have inferior karma, Pāli scriptures imply women's inferiority and/or subordination.

More damaging is perhaps the *Jātaka* section of the Pāli canon, which tells the stories of the Buddha's previous births. To be fair, the *Jātaka* contains tales of male misdeeds as well as these of women, but heroes of nearly all *Jātaka* tales are male. This may not be unexpected since heroes of *Jātaka* stories are identified with the Buddha and his attendants (also male). However, the *Jātaka* stories often depict the 'ingratitude, deception, untrustworthiness and sensuality of women' (Horner 1930: 50), such as the story of an old brahmin's young wife plotting to kill her husband in order to be with her lover (*Sattubhastā-Jātaka*) or the story of how men's virtues might be overcome by the wiles of women (*Nalinikā-Jātaka*).<sup>7</sup> Thus, those tales seem to be told from a male perspective and advocate the need to

control women. Although the stories of the *Jātaka* probably pre-date Buddhism and include non-Buddhist elements – not only because there is a question about the historicity of the supposed editorship of Buddhaghosa but also because the *Jātaka* is known to be a collection of various tales that already existed prior to the time of Buddhaghosa (Jayawickrama 1990: xi–xii) and tales that exist in many different versions (see, for example, Skilton 2002) – given the popular nature of the *Jātaka*, its androcentric influence on Buddhists might not be insignificant.

Pāli scriptures may not directly state the inferior karma of women, but various stories found in Pāli scriptures nevertheless imply women's inferiority to men, for these stories urge women's subordination to men and portray women as spiritually and morally inferior. In the Chinese scriptures, womanhood is often discouraged, too. For example, one of the forty-eight vows made by the *bodhisattvas* who develops into Buddha Amitāyus is as follows:

If, when I attain Buddhahood, women in the immeasurable and inconceivable Buddha-lands of ten directions who, having heard my Name, rejoice in faith, awaken aspiration for Enlightenment, and wish to renounce womanhood should after death be reborn again as women, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.

(*The Larger Sūtra on Amitāyus*<sup>8</sup>)

The quote above from a Chinese *sūtra* suggests the undesirability of womanhood. The undesirability of womanhood might be refuted by the concept of emptiness in Mahāyāna tradition. For instance, in a story from the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, Elder Śāriputra is ridiculed by a goddess for not being able to transcend the duality of sexes:

Śāriputra: 'Why don't you change your female sex?'

Goddess: 'I have been here twelve years and have looked for the innate characteristics of the female sex and haven't been able to find them. How can I change them? Just as a magician creates an illusion of a woman, if someone asks why don't you change your female sex, what is he asking?'

Śāriputra: 'But an illusion is without any determinate innate characteristics so how could it be changed?'

Goddess: 'All things are also without any determinate innate characteristics, so how can you ask, "why don't you change your female sex?"'

Then the goddess, by supernatural power, changed Śāriputra into a likeness of herself and changed herself into a likeness of Śāriputra and asked: 'Why don't you change your female sex?'

Śāriputra, in the form of a goddess, answered: 'I do not know how I changed nor how I changed into a female form.'



Goddess: ‘Śāriputra, if you can change into a female form, then all women [in mental state] can also change. Just as you are not really a woman but appear to be female in form, all women, also only appear to be female in form but are not really women. Therefore, the Buddha said all are not really men or women.’

(*The Sūtra of the Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa)*,  
quoted from Paul 1979: 230)

The statement above indicates the transcendence of the duality of sexes, suggesting that both female and male bodies are nothing but illusion. The transcendence of sexes, however, does not seem to leave an impression on Taiwanese Buddhists’ memory. Some Taiwanese Buddhist nuns I talked to believed that women were born women because women accumulated five-hundred-lives less of spiritual practices than men. Unfortunately, none of the nuns was able to tell me the exact *sūtra* where this idea originates, nor could I pinpoint the exact *sūtra* through my own research on the Chinese version of *Taishō Tripitaka*.<sup>9</sup> But I did find direct statements in the Chinese Buddhist scriptures that suggest women’s inferior karma:

The Buddha said: ‘It is difficult to free oneself from the three evil realms [the hells, the realm of hungry ghosts, and the realm of animals], and attain human birth. Even if one attains human birth it is difficult to be born a man rather than a woman. Even if one is born a man it is difficult to be born perfect in all six sense faculties. Even if the six sense faculties are perfect it is difficult to be born in the Middle Kingdom. Even if one lives in the Middle Kingdom it is difficult to be born at a time when the Buddha’s Way is honored. Even if born when the Buddha’s Way is honored it is difficult to encounter a noble man of the Way. [Moreover,] it is difficult to be born in the family of *bodhisattvas*. Even if born in the family of *bodhisattvas* it is difficult to encounter the Buddha’s presence in the world with a mind of faith in the three honored ones.’

(*The Scripture in Forty-two Sections* (36),  
quoted from Sharf 1996: 370)

However, the historicity and authenticity of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* (*Sishi’er zhang jing*) has been questioned. For instance, Lv Zheng suggested that the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* is merely a collection of edited quotations from various Chinese versions of the *Dhammapada* (2003: 29–43). In his comparison between the above quotations from the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* and the Chinese versions of the *Dhammapada*, it appears that there is no corresponding statement in the *Dhammapada* that suggests women’s inferior birth (Lv 2003: 432). Despite the various



questions regarding the historicity and authenticity of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections*, the text remains a popular introductory textbook to Buddhism (Sharf 1996). Since in Buddhism, the condition of rebirth depends on one's karma, one might read the statement as saying that womanhood is the result of women's inferior karma.

Therefore, it may be sufficient to say that by using Pāli scriptures, Sri Lankan nuns are exposed to indirect statements that encourage women's subordination to men. On the other hand, by using Chinese scriptures as the foundation of their religion, Taiwanese Buddhist nuns are exposed to direct statements that suggest women's inferior karma. This might explain why I found, in my fieldwork, that Sri Lankan nuns were more likely than Taiwanese nuns to disregard the idea of women's inferior karma.

### *Fieldwork findings*

Table 6 reveals that Taiwanese nuns are more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to believe the idea of women's inferior karma. This may not be a surprise since the previous section has shown that there are more statements in Chinese scriptures to imply women's inferior karma than in Pāli scriptures. Yet, it is also important to note that in both Sri Lankan and Taiwanese samples, there are more respondents who do not accept the idea of women's inferior karma than those who do.

Interestingly, Table 7 challenges the image that older people tend to be more conservative or more accepting of traditional views than younger people, as the table shows that it is the middle-aged group (41–50 years old<sup>10</sup>), rather than the younger age groups, that is most likely to think positively of women's karma. This result is puzzling. When I posed this finding to a middle-aged American nun, she suggested that it might be related to nuns' confidence. Younger nuns, being younger and probably at lower positions in the sangha hierarchy, might feel less confident about the insights they gained from their spiritual practices and less secure about their

*Table 6* Responses to the question: 'Do you agree that women were born women because they have less merit than men?'

	<i>Sri Lankan nuns (%)</i>	<i>Taiwanese nuns (%)</i>
Yes, I agree	20.2	39.3
No, I don't agree	51.4	43.3
I don't know	14.9	1.6
Other	12.1	13.6
No answer	1.4	2.2
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
<i>Total (no.)</i>	74	492

*Table 7* Responses to the question: ‘Do you agree that women were born women because they have less merit than men?’, broken down by age of respondents

**Sri Lankan nuns**

<i>Age</i>	<i>&lt;20</i>	<i>21–30</i>	<i>31–40</i>	<i>41–50</i>	<i>51–60</i>	<i>&gt;61</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Yes, I agree	0.0	20.0	21.4	0.0	18.8	36.8	
No, I don’t agree	100.0	40.0	50.0	57.1	56.2	47.4	
I don’t know	0.0	20.0	0.0	28.6	18.8	10.5	
Other	0.0	20.0	28.6	14.3	0.0	5.3	
No answer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.2	0.0	
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
<i>Total (no.)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>0</i>

**Taiwanese nuns**

<i>Age</i>	<i>&lt;20</i>	<i>21–30</i>	<i>31–40</i>	<i>41–50</i>	<i>51–60</i>	<i>&gt;61</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Yes, I agree	0.0	34.5	39.9	36.7	54.5	50.0	0.0
No, I don’t agree	100.0	41.7	41.9	47.4	34.1	50.0	100.0
I don’t know	0.0	0.0	1.0	3.2	2.3	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	21.4	15.7	9.5	6.8	0.0	0.0
No answer	0.0	2.4	1.5	3.2	2.3	0.0	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Total (no.)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1</i>

future in sangha. On the other hand, older nuns, having more years in spiritual practice and probably at higher positions in the sangha hierarchy, might feel more confident about the insights they gained from their spiritual practice and more secure about their future in sangha. As a result, older nuns, rather than younger nuns, are more likely to feel confident and secure enough to voice challenges against scriptural statements that suggest women’s subordination/inferior karma. While this seems like a plausible interpretation, further study into this area is needed. Other interpretations regarding to this finding will be explored further in later sections (e.g. the education factor).

The nuns’ reasons for refuting the idea of women’s inferior karma are not always based on scriptural statements that bear directly on the subject, and the common reasons used by Sri Lankan nuns and Taiwanese nuns vary. Sri Lankan nuns commonly referred to the complexity of ‘dependent origination’ for refuting the idea of women’s inferior karma. They pointed out that to ascribe female birth as the consequence of inferior karma is to simplify the complexity of ‘dependent origination’, which relates conditions of one’s birth (material and class situation, physical health, paternal relations, etc. and sex) as the consequences of many different deeds committed at many different times. No single deed can determine one’s

conditions and social relations at this life. Indeed, a Sinhala text, the *Saddharmaratnāvaliya*,<sup>11</sup> contains stories of women's rebirths, and it is clear from those stories that the karmic consequence is an individualistic matter. To subscribe inferior karma to all female births suggests that all women committed 'dependent origination' as a group, and this is to ignore that karma is a matter of individual rather than collective responsibility. The karmic 'make-up' of a Buddha, for instance, is his/her own only, and cannot be shared by others. Additionally, human birth is considered a result of good karma. To be born as women, rather than animals or other beings, is a manifestation of superior karma rather than inferior karma. For example, one ten-precepts nun said,

I don't think women have less merit than men, because too many things in past life determine our sex in this life. Both men and women can become *arahant*. Women and men are equal and women do not suffer more than men.

(SN24, in Sinhala, age 37, ordained for 16 years)

Another ten-precepts nun pointed out,

There is no such thing in *Dharma* [that women were born women because of sinful actions in the previous life]. There is no such rule. Karma is the only thing.

(SN19, in English, age 52, ordained for 10 years)

Sri Lankan interviewee nuns who disagreed with the idea of women's inferior karma (e.g. SN 13<sup>12</sup>) often gave statements similar to the one above. That is, to be reborn as female or male is an individual matter and cannot be associated with female or male as a generalized group. One ten-precepts nun even refuted the idea of women's inferior karma by pointing out that,

I don't think that women have less merit than men. Just think about Mahāpajāpatī: if she had done bad things in the previous life, she wouldn't be able to become an *arahant*.

(SN16, in Sinhala, age 46, ordained for 19 years)

Others might use real-life survey observation to refute the idea of women's inferior karma. A Taiwanese respondent nun writes, '... the sex ratio in the world is approximately half male and half female. If [sexes are determined] by the inferiority and superiority of karma, how is it possible to be half and half of the population?' (age 31–40, ordained for 4–10 years, answered 'no'). It shows that factors other than scriptures might determine a nun's concepts.

While Sri Lankan nuns commonly apply the concept of 'dependent origination' to refute the idea of women's inferior karma, Taiwanese nuns are likely to appeal to the concept of *bodhisattva* in Mahāyāna Buddhism to refute this idea. For example, one Taiwanese nun said,

Some people are *bodhisattvas*. He/she shows himself/herself as a filthy-looking person, and how would you know that he/she is actually an *arahant*? It's true. It's really true. If an *arahant* or *bodhisattva* wants to appear in this world, you wouldn't be able to tell [him/her apart from others]. So we shouldn't rely on our human eyes and personal speculation and say, 'You're not a great *Dharma* master. You're not *Dharma* Master Yinshun.<sup>13</sup> I don't want to pay homage to you.' I think you would miss a great chance. In my opinion, people's individual spiritual progress is not within our ability to tell. How can you tell? How would you know, 'Oh, I know your mind is not pure, and you have not reached this and that level of spiritual practice'?

(TN15, age 47, ordained for 23 years)

That is, according to the *bodhisattva* idea in Mahāyāna Buddhism, a *bodhisattva* might delay his/her nirvāna or *parinirāvana* to stay in the world in order to help living beings (Robinson and Johnson 1997: 100; Skilton 1994: 109–113). As a *bodhisattva* might manifest in various forms, young or old, rich or poor, clean or dirty, an ordinary-looking woman might turn out to be a *bodhisattva* who is karmically and spiritually superior to men. Therefore, women do not necessarily have inferior karma to men, for even a 'filthy-looking person' may actually be an *arahant* or *bodhisattva*. Furthermore, it is an offense for ordinary monks to judge others on the basis of karmic inferiority or superiority. It is an attitude of the Buddha that it is an individual's karmic past that has led him/her to his/her current state and women thus are not collectively and karmically inferior to men.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Buddhism asserts that only a Buddha has the ability to see the karmic consequence of a person's actions, and only a Buddha is able to tell how a person's karmic past that has led to his/her current state (Jaini 1974: 81). Hence, it is certainly inappropriate for a person to judge another person's karma.

Socially, the idea of women's inferior karma might hinder nuns to compete in the same activities as monks. This problem seems to be more severe in Taiwan than in Sri Lanka, as my Sri Lankan nun informants generally insisted that *bhikkhuni* are allowed to participate in all rituals in the same ways as *bhikkhu*. On the other hand, in Taiwan, nuns are usually prohibited from leading 'ghost rituals', such as *shui ch'an* (water penance) and *fang yen-k'ou* (release of the burning mouths).<sup>15</sup> Both rituals aim to

bring relief, no matter how temporary it might be, to the suffering denizens of hells and hungry ghosts (Levering 1989b: 79–80). One Taiwanese nun related this taboo against women leading ghost rituals to women's polluting nature and inferior karma:

When [some laity] see monks, they say, 'Oh, great *Dharma* master'. Some people prefer to invite monks for some rituals. In rituals such as *fang yen-k'ou* and *shui ch'an*, they only want monks. Generally, it is the case that these rituals are led by monks. . . . We women are not as clean and it is the main reason. *Fang yen-k'ou* is a dirty task. For example, we have menstruation. . . . You see, these rituals have unclean things, so it is inconvenient [for nuns to lead]. . . . [To perform *fang yen-k'ou*], one needs lots of merit due to the need for releasing lots of *qi* (energy). . . . We [women] have inferior karma.

(TN16, age 62, ordained for more than 20 years)

Hence, the idea of women's inferior karma (and polluting nature) strips Taiwanese nuns of the chance to be the leaders in some rituals.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the case of ghost rituals in Taiwan also reveals the diversity among Buddhist beliefs and practices, for ghost rituals do not exist in Sinhala Buddhism. This is another reminder of the need to avoid generalizations in Buddhist studies.

The mention of menstruation in TN16's statement above is also interesting, but unfortunately, I did not choose blood taboo as part of my research. When I occasionally asked, my Sri Lankan informants generally replied that there was no such thing as blood taboo that restricted menstruating women from entering Buddhist temples or attending Buddhist rituals. The reason for not choosing blood taboo as part of my research was that as a Taiwanese growing up in a Buddhist environment, I had never encountered any occasion on which blood taboo prevented me from entering a temple or attending a ritual. Some Taiwanese temples (including both mixed-sex and single-sex temples) that I visited even provided female sanitary towels in the female restrooms: had the temples restricted menstruating women from entering, they would not have done this. Consequently, blood taboo did not exist in my consciousness, in the way that it simply did not occur to me that there is such a thing as blood taboo in Buddhism. It was not until some of my informants mentioned the blood taboo in relation to ghost rituals during my fieldwork that I became aware of the existence of blood taboo in Taiwanese Buddhism. My experience is in contrast to an article by a Western nun, read out at Sakyadhita Conference 2002,<sup>17</sup> which states that there is a strong blood taboo in Taiwanese Buddhism. The contradiction between the Western nun's and my experiences shows the complexity of a culture because even a native like me may

not be acquainted with every segment of it. One Taiwanese interviewee nun told me,

No! There is no such thing [that menstruating women] should not enter Buddha Hall! Yes, I have heard of this kind of [rumor]. But we definitely would never hold such a position.

(TN14, age 40, ordained for 12 years)

Apparently, there are various segments in Taiwanese Buddhism itself. While TN16 minded the blood taboo, TN14 disregarded it. It is therefore difficult to generalize.

Although the idea of women's inferior karma affects Buddhist nuns' welfare, Buddhist nuns are able to turn this damaging idea into a positive motivation. For example, one Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* said,

I think that women have less merit than men. As women, you have to bear more sufferings than men. Yet, considering the pain women have to suffer in life, you would make more efforts in the spiritual practices.

(SN9, in Sinhala, age 32, ordained for 20 years)

This statement is a common response from (both Sri Lankan and Taiwanese) nuns who replied that women have less merit than men. That is, because of women's inferior karma, women have to suffer more than men, and yet, the sufferings can motivate women to be diligent in spiritual practice in order to escape the cycle of rebirth (as in Sri Lanka) or to be reborn as men (as in Taiwan). As such, the negative idea of women's inferior karma becomes a positive motivation in the pursuit of spiritual practice.

Additionally, although my research on the question of women's karma is based on the Western feminist critique which assumes that the idea of women's inferior karma leads to the subordination of women (which is accepted as a hypothesis in this research) it is worth pointing out that some of my nun informants' answers suggested otherwise. For example, one Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* said,

Women can attain *arahanthood*. It may be possible that we have done some sin to be born as a woman. But there is no difference as far as gender is concerned. We must try to assert our rights and contribute equally. One may be born as a woman, but to get a human form one needs lots of merit. It is said that to be born as a human being is very difficult. A *Dharma* story says, 'There is a one-eyed turtle in the depths of the sea. It comes up once every thousand years to see the light. That the time should coincide with a floating plank which has a hole and the turtle sees the light through

the hole is indeed rare, and so is becoming a human.’<sup>18</sup> To look for a gender difference is futile. Women have been in the forefront. Women can attain *arahanthood*.

(SN5, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 36 years)

‘To look for a gender difference is futile’ is a voice frequently heard throughout my fieldwork in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan. It implies the different agendas of Buddhist nuns and feminists: while feminist critiques address the interests of women, Buddhist nuns seek spiritual advancement as human beings. SN5’s statement further shows that even though a nun may accept the idea of women’s inferior karma, it does not necessarily follow that she would also accept women’s inferiority in all aspects. SN5 clearly stated that not only women can attain *arahanthood* but also women must ‘assert our rights and contribute equally’. It reflects the canonical position: nuns are relegated socially by subordination to monks and need extra rules such as the Eight Special Rules to ensure their subordination, but at the same time, women are stated to be equally capable of enlightenment as men.

### *Summary*

In both Pāli and Chinese scriptures, one can find statements suggesting the inferior karma of women or the subordination of women. And yet, the survey shows that more nuns dismiss the idea of women’s inferior karma than nuns who accept it. Reasons to reject this idea vary. While Sri Lankan nuns are likely to apply the idea of ‘dependent origination’ in Buddhism and to emphasize the enormous merit required for human birth, Taiwanese nuns are likely to appeal to the *bodhisattva* ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, the formation of a gender-related concept in a religion may not be solely based on a single statement from the scriptures, for other scriptural statements and religious elements might influence the formation of the concept. Even though the idea of women’s inferior karma might harm the nuns’ welfare (e.g. the loss of rights to lead ghost rituals in Chinese Buddhism), nuns might turn this idea into a positive motivation for spiritual practice.

### **Ultimate goal**

Women’s relationship with the Ultimate has been a frequent theme in feminist discourse on religion, such as how earthly authority that subjugates women might be done in the name of the Ultimate (e.g. Badawi 1994) or how to transcend the gender imagery/symbol of the Ultimate for women (e.g. Joy 1995; Christ 1997). On the other hand, Gross argues that as an atheistic religion, the issue for feminist discourse on Buddhism does not lie

in gender transcendence of the Ultimate (that is, goddess, god-language) (1996: 235). For feminist discourse on Buddhism, one issue that has been frequently challenged is the issue of whether women can become a Buddha (e.g. Paul 1979: 281–291) or, for reasons to be explained in the following subsection, what I should call ‘the question of whether women can reach the ultimate goal in Buddhism’.

*Bhikkhu* Walpola Rahula writes, ‘... it is quite clear that the Buddha’s teaching is meant to carry man [and woman] to safety, peace, happiness, tranquility, the attainment of [nirvāṇa]’ (1959: 12). In other words, in Buddhism, the ultimate goal in Buddhism is to attain nirvāṇa. As such, the feminist discourse on this issue should be on whether Buddhism regards women as having the same capacity and opportunity as men in the attainment of nirvāṇa. This section will be devoted to the discussion of related textual discourse and on Sri Lankan and Taiwanese nuns’ views on this issue.

### *Scripture*

Although all Buddhists ultimately aspire to nirvāṇa, it is important to note that the general aspirations differ in Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. In Theravāda Buddhism, most aspire to be an *arahant*, but in Mahāyāna Buddhism, most aspire to be a Buddha. Although the two goals are recognized in both traditions, the Theravāda regards the aim to become a full Buddha as much rarer. Mahāyāna Buddhism recognizes both *arahantship* and Buddhahood but considers that only Buddhahood is worth of aspiring to. Both Buddha and *arahant* have attained nirvāṇa though different in their ability (Robinson and Johnson 1997: 83–84). A Buddha has chosen not to accept the nirvāṇa goal but to progress to the highest goal of full Buddhahood. A Buddha is also an *arahant*, but Theravāda Buddhism considers *arahantship* more practical to aspire to, since one needs numerous rebirths as *Bodhisattva* before attaining Buddhahood. The ideal of *Bodhisattva* is a significant difference between Theravāda Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *Bodhisattva* path is highly stressed in Mahāyāna Buddhism, although within Theravāda Buddhism, the *Bodhisattva* path is accepted as an important path, but it is less emphasized as an achievable goal for most people (Ratnayaka 1985). Accordingly, the aspiration for nirvāṇa is different for Sri Lankan nuns and for Taiwanese nuns. Because of this difference, I call the issue discussed in this section as ‘the question of whether women can attain the ultimate goal in Buddhism’, rather than whether women can become Buddha.

It seems that the issue of women’s attainment of the ultimate goal does not pose a problem to Sri Lankan Buddhists. Nearly all my Sri Lankan informants had no doubt in the equal ability and opportunity in the attainment of nirvāṇa for both sexes, for the stories of Sanghamittā,



Mahāpajāpatī and others are fondly remembered in Sri Lanka. The story of Sanghamittā is especially interesting because of her connection with the island of Sri Lanka. She is highly venerated in contemporary Sri Lanka, for she not only brought the *bhikkhunī* order but also brought the sacred Bōdhi-tree branch to the island. As Sanghamittā and many of her immediate followers attained *arahantship*,<sup>19</sup> the popularity of her story only adds affirmation in the minds of Sri Lankan Buddhists that women have the ability and opportunity to attain the ultimate goal in Theravāda Buddhism.

Furthermore, Buddhist women in Sri Lanka can find aspiration and role models in the Pāli canon, the *Therīgāthā*. The *Therīgāthā* is a collection of seventy-three poems, supposedly composed by the earliest Buddhist nuns. As Gross puts it: '... the existence of the *Therīgāthā*, with its sympathetic portraits of women who took Buddhism's message fully to heart and achieved its goal of peace and release, stands as a challenge to all Buddhists of all times who would prefer women to do less' (1993: 54), the *Therīgāthā* provides proof to Sri Lankan Buddhists that women can be as spiritually capable as men. Stories of nuns in the *Therīgāthā* prove that women have the same capacity as men in spiritual attainment, because all the nuns in the text attained *arahantship*. The verses of *Therīgāthā* were transmitted orally for six centuries before being written down (Murcott 1991: 3–10). Considering that the power of literacy was largely in the hands of men, it is amazing that these verses would be written down at all.

For example, here is the story of Khema, the beautiful consort of King Bimbisara, who is said to possess the greatest insight and has attained nirvāna while still a laywoman. The *Therīgāthā* records the verses between her and the Devil, Māra, who appears as a young man with the attempt to seduce her:

[Māra:]

Come on, Khema!

Both of us are young

And you are beautiful.

Let's enjoy each other!

It will be like the music of a symphony.

[Khema:]

I'm disgusted by this body.

It's foul and diseased.

It torments me.

Your desire for sex

means nothing to me.

Pleasures of the senses are

swords and stakes.  
 The elements of mind and body  
 are a chopping block for them.  
 What you call  
 delight  
 is not delight for me.  
 Everywhere the love of pleasure  
 is destroyed,  
 the great dark  
 is torn apart,  
 and Death,  
 you too are destroyed.  
 Fools,  
 who don't know things  
 as they really are,  
 revere the mansions of the moon  
 and tend the fire in the wood  
 thinking this is purity.  
 But for myself,  
 I honor the Enlightened One  
 the best of all  
 and, practicing his teaching,  
 am completely freed from suffering.  
 (quoted from Murcott 1991: 65–66)

Since Khema attains nirvāna while still a laywoman, her story gives a clear indication that, for Theravāda Buddhists, even a layperson could attain the ultimate goal in Buddhism. This is indeed a doctrinal certainty, for other Pāli scriptural writings also confirm a layperson's ability to attain nirvāna (e.g. the *Milindapañha* (VI)).<sup>20</sup> In addition, the story of Khema is interesting because very often, feminists' attention focuses on stories that portray women as temptresses (e.g. Paul 1979: 3–59) and seldom notice that men can also be obstacles in women's spiritual progress. Khema's conversation with Māra, disguised visually as a young man, reveals that men can be obstacles to women's spirituality just as women can be to men's. The verses of Khema thus indicate that it is the attachment to sexuality and physical beauty, rather than male or female sexuality, that is a distraction to one's spiritual progress.

However, because Mahāyāna Buddhism aspires to Buddhahood rather than *arahantship*, the issue of the ultimate goal appears to be more problematic for Taiwanese Buddhist women than for Sri Lankan Buddhist women. That is, as Diana Paul demonstrates, Mahāyāna scriptural writings often suggest that one cannot attain Buddhahood in a woman's body (1979). This is partly because of the idea of the thirty-two physical marks of a

Buddha. One can find in the Pāli canon, the *Dīgha Nikāya*, mention of the thirty-two marks possessed by one who will either be a universe monarch or a Buddha:

(1) He has feet with level tread. (2) On the soles of his feet are wheels with a thousand spokes. . . (10) His male organs are enclosed in a sheath. . . (32) His head is like a royal turban.

(*Mahāpadānasutta*, 1.32<sup>21</sup>)

This statement from the *Dīgha Nikāya* was also translated into Chinese.<sup>22</sup> The mention of male organs as the tenth physical mark of a Buddha/universe monarch excludes women from Buddhahood.

Additionally, Pure Land scriptures in Mahāyāna Buddhism also send out negative messages about a woman's body by frequently indicating that no one will be reborn as woman in Pure Land. Although Harrison finds that even among different Pure Land scriptures, and even between different Chinese translations of the same text, there is no uniform statement regarding women and rebirth in Pure Land, with nearly all texts indicating the undesirability of female embodiment (1998). For example, one of the earliest translated versions of the vows of Amitābha suggests that there is no woman in Pure Land:

The second vow: When I become a Buddha, may there be no women in my country. Women wishing to come and be reborn in my country will forthwith become men. All the countless gods, human beings and species that flit and wriggle who come to be reborn in my country will be born through spontaneous generation in lotus flowers in pools made of the seven precious substances, and they will grow up and all become *Bodhisattvas* or [*arahants*], quite beyond counting. If this vow is fulfilled, then I will become a Buddha. If this vow is not fulfilled, I will never become a Buddha.

(*Fo shuo amituo-sanyesanfo-saloufotan guodu rendao jing*,  
quoted from Harrison 1998: 558)

Another version contains a subtler message by suggesting that only women who are disgusted with the female body will be reborn as men in Pure Land:

Lord, after I have attained *bōdhi* and achieved perfect awakening, as for all the women in all the countless, boundless numberless worlds in the ten quarters, if any of them are disgusted with a female body, and hear my name, have pure thoughts and take refuge in me with prostrations, those persons shall at the end of

their lives be born in my *ksetra* assuming male bodies, and they shall all be made to achieve *amuttara-samyak-sambodhi*.

(*Foshuo dahseng wuliangshou zhuangyen jing*, quoted from Harrison 1998: 558)

In both cases, a woman's body is denoted with negativity, for Amitābha vows to help women to be reborn as men in Pure Land. Hence, if a woman wishes to attain Buddhahood *via Pure Land* (even within Mahāyāna Buddhism, rebirth at Pure Land is not a necessary path to Buddhahood), she may first have to be reborn as a man there.

However, the obstacle for women wishing to attain Buddhahood might be overcome by sex transformation. There is the famous story of an eight-year-old Nāga princess who outwits Elder Śāriputra, showing him that even a female animal can attain nirvāṇa:

At that moment, the venerable Śāriputra spoke to the daughter of Sāgara, the Nāga king: 'Good daughter, you have certainly not wavered in awakening to the thought of enlightenment and have immeasurable wisdom. However, the state of Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment is difficult to realize. Good daughter, even a woman who does not falter in diligence for many hundreds of eras and performs meritorious acts for many thousands of eras, completely fulfilling the six perfections still does not realize five types of status. What are the five types? (1) The status of Brahma, (2) the status of Śakra (Indra), (3) the status of a great king, (4) the status of an emperor, and (5) the status of an irreversible Bodhisattva'. . . .

The girl spoke: 'If it were possible for me to have magical power, reverend Śāriputra, I would have realized Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment even more quickly [than the Buddha's receiving the jewel], and there would have been no receiver of this jewel.'

Then, at that instant in time, before the Elder Śāriputra and the entire world, king Sāgara's daughter's female organs vanished, and the male organ became visible. She appeared as a Bodhisattva. At that instant in time, he walked toward the south; sitting at the foot of the Bōdhi tree made of seven jewels in the world system Vimalā [immaculate], he appeared as an enlightened one. Radiating a form having the thirty-two marks and all ancillary marks, permeating all directions, he began teaching the *Dharma*. On the earth, all beings saw the Tathāgata and all the gods and semidivine beings like the Nāgas, Gandharvas, . . . and nonhuman and human beings paid homage to him while he taught the *Dharma*. All who listened to the Tathāgata's teaching of the *Dharma* did not retrogress and realized the Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment. The world

system Vimalā and the earth quaked through six stages of change. Three thousand beings in Śākamuni's assembly attained patience in understanding nonarising phenomena. Three hundred thousand attained the prediction of Supreme, Perfect Enlightenment.

Then the Bodhisattva Prajñākūṭa and the Elder Śāriputra were silent.

(quoted from Paul 1979: 189–190)

The story of the Nāga princess, as I will show in the next section, leaves a deep impression in Taiwanese nuns' memory. Yet, Taiwanese nuns' interpretations of the story are not consistent, for while some find it empowering because it shows that women may attain Buddhahood, others find it discouraging because of the need for sexual transformation. Since 'perceptions and constructs of the inexpressible, mysterious nature of Ultimate Reality are of profound significance for our own self-understanding and the way we shape our lives in society' (King 1989: 125), if one needs a male body to attain Buddhahood, it might persuade us to think that a female body is less desirable than a male body and thus shapes our everyday interactions in contexts not necessarily related to the ultimate goal accordingly. Therefore, although the story of the Nāga princess, and the story of goddess cited earlier, confirms that women can attain the ultimate goal in Mahāyāna Buddhism, some may find the mention of sexual transformation in the stories unsatisfying.

It is perhaps interesting to mention that although most participants in Theravāda Buddhism do not aspire to Buddhahood, Walters finds narratives in the Pāli scriptures of the *Gotamī-apadāna* to suggest female Buddhahood. In the *Gotamī-apadāna*, Mahāpajāptī's entering *parinirāvana* is described, and is depicted as a wondrous event. Because the narrative is explicitly parallel to the description of the Buddha's *parinirāvana* as described in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, because Gotamī is highly venerated by both human and deities, and because she does not just enter nirvāna but *parinirāvana*, Walters argues that the *Gotamī-apadāna* portrays Mahāpajāptī as a female counterpart of the Buddha (1994: 371–376). The pattern of gender-pairing in Theravāda texts (also see Skilling 2001) might be interpreted as a feminist voice, for it gives women an equivalent position in the religious discourse. Seen from this perspective, one may argue that although *Gotamī-apadāna* does not explicitly state that one can attain Buddhahood in a woman's body, it indicates female Buddhahood in the paradigm of Mahāpajāptī. The *Gotamī-apadāna* can also be found in the Chinese scripture of the *Da Zhuangyan Lunjing* (T04), in which, the order of verses is slightly different from the Pāli version (English translation by Walters 1995: 118–138) but the content is more or less the same. Despite Walters' empowering interpretation of the *Gotamī-apadāna*, none of my Taiwanese nun informants nor any Western feminist critiques on Buddhism that I am

aware of mentions Mahāpajāpti's entering *parinirāvana* as a scriptural proof of the possibility of attaining Buddhahood in a woman's body.

Nonetheless, not all Mahāyāna scriptures denounce a woman's body. Rita Gross, for instance, finds the idea of emptiness/egolessness (*śūnyatā*), emphasized in Madhyamaka teaching (derived Mahāyāna Buddhism)<sup>23</sup> empowering (1993: 173–184). That is, according to the doctrine of emptiness/egolessness, all things lack inherent existence, so phenomena such as sexes are nothing but illusions. Therefore, 'the attempt to limit and classify people on the basis of sex, to say that women can't do something or that men should behave in a certain way, is to make absolute determinations and discriminations on the basis of a relative, empty trait' (Gross 1993: 177). It is exemplified in the popular Chinese *Diamond Sūtra* (the *Vajracchedika-prajna-paramita Sūtra*):

[Buddha:] '[Śāriputra], what do you think? Can the [*Tathāgata*] be recognized by His thirty-two physical characteristics?'

[Śāriputra] replied: 'Yes, yes, He can'.

[Buddha:] '[Śāriputra], if the [*Tathāgata*] can be recognized by His thirty-two physical characteristics, a [Monarch, Turner of the Wheel] [*cakravattī*] would be the [*Tathāgata*].'

[Śāriputra:] World Honoured One, as I understand your teachings, the [*Tathāgata*] cannot be recognized by His thirty-two physical characteristics'.

[Buddha:]

He who sees me by outward appearance

(And) seeks me in sound,

Treads the heterodox path

(And) cannot perceive the [*Tathāgata*].

And the *sūtra* ends with the following verse:

All phenomena are like

A dream, an illusion, a bubble and a shadow,

Like dew and lightning,

Thus should you meditate upon them.<sup>24</sup>

The verses above might be interpreted for an androgynous purpose, such as Taiwanese *bhikkhu* Sheng-Yen's commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra*, which argues that because all phenomena are nothing but illusion, clinging to the thirty-two physical marks (or any outward appearance or sound) strays away from *Dharma* (1999b). This view is shared by Diana Paul, who sees that the *Diamond Sūtra* proclaims the irrelevance of the thirty-two physical marks and as such, women are not precluded from attaining Buddhahood (1979: 219–220). Given that the *Diamond Sūtra* is one of the

most popular Chinese scriptures, it is not surprising that many of my Taiwanese nun informants share this view. They point out that since phenomena are illusions, the very discussion of whether one can attain Buddhahood in a woman's body is clinging too much to the outward appearances of sexes and thus is astray from *Dharma*. This is not to mention that there is another Chinese scripture explicitly stating that sexual distinction is illusion:

Maleness and femaleness are empty of inherent existence;  
Duality arises because of deluded attachment and concordant conditions.

Tathāgata permanently extinguishes the cause of delusion;  
The true nature of things contains no distinction between maleness and femaleness.

The wondrous Bōdhi fruit is the same for all;  
Only the delusion of ordinary minds sees distinction.  
The thirty-two marks of a Buddha are ultimately no marks;  
One must understand that marks are not marks – then that is understanding the real state of things.

(*Dasheng Bensheng Diguan Jing (The Sūtra of Mind Meditation in Mahāyāna Jātaka)* (T03))<sup>25</sup>

Accordingly, not only the thirty-two marks of a Buddha is an illusion but also the distinction between maleness and femaleness is non-existent. One may thus argue that since there is no difference between maleness and femaleness, Buddhahood is asexual.

It is perhaps interesting to note that according to the preface by Emperor Tang Xianzong (r. 806–820 CE) who supposedly commissioned the Chinese translation of the *sūtra*, the *sūtra* was transmitted from nowhere other than Sri Lanka during the reign of Emperor Tang Gaozong (r. 649–683 CE). But this is a rarely read *sūtra*. To my knowledge, *bhikkhu* Taixu's (1898–1947) commentary is the only existing written commentary on it.<sup>26</sup> It is thus unlikely that Taiwanese Buddhists are well informed about this *sūtra*. As such, its effect on Taiwanese Buddhists is minimal.

I will show in the next section how nuns themselves deal with the problem.

### *Fieldwork findings*

Not long after I began my fieldwork in Sri Lanka, I realized that the question, 'Do you agree that women can attain nirvāna/obtain *arahantship*?' was unnecessary, as I found that the story of Sanghamittā was widely cherished on the island. Nearly all nunneries I visited (including both *bhikkhunī* and ten-precept nuns' nunneries) had a statue of Sanghamittā.

Nearly all Sri Lankans whom I asked the question about the possibility of female *arahantship* gave me a positive answer, citing the story of Sanghamittā (or Mahāpajāptī) as the proof of women's ability to attain *arahantship*. For example, a Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* said:

Women can become *arahants*. An *arahant* is a person who obtains nirvāṇa. We don't want to become a Buddha. We want to become *arahants*. We want to stop rebirth. Why can't women become *arahants*? How about the Buddha's stepmother? These princesses? Buddha never said that [women have inferior karma than men]. You can't say a woman is inferior than a man!

(SN12, in English, age 52, ordained for 6 years)

Apparently, SN12 found inspiration in the stories of early Buddhist women such as Mahāpajāptī, and seemed to find my question regarding women's ability and the ultimate goal unbelievable (or foolish, as I felt at the time). She seemed to take it for granted that women could attain the ultimate goal (at least the ultimate goal in Theravāda Buddhism), and my question in that regard showed only my ignorance about *Dharma*.

It was not only *bhikkhunī* who believed that women could attain the ultimate goal – so did ten-precept nuns. A ten-precept nun said:

Lord Buddha said that women can become *arahant*. Even nowadays, women can become *arahant*. However, there exist many obstacles. If I want to attain nirvāṇa, I will have to become an *arahant*. But I don't think that I can become an *arahant* in this very life, because I don't have enough time to meditate! I don't think that I will be able to achieve *arahantship*. I don't think that women have less merit than men. Just think about Mahāpajāptī! If she had done bad things in the previous life, she wouldn't be able to become an *arahant*. Even if we were women in this life, we can still practice *Dharma*.

(SN16, in Sinhala, age 46, ordained for 19 years)

Once again, the story of Mahāpajāptī was cited as an inspiration for women. Given the prevalence of the stories of Mahāpajāptī, Sanghamittā, and the *Therīgāthā*, my fieldwork question about whether women can attain nirvāṇa seemed ridiculous in a Theravāda context, as it was obvious that stories of women attaining *arahantship* were very well known in Sri Lanka. However, SN16's statement also shows a nun's anxiety and struggle between mundane matters and spiritual practice. Even though she believed in women's ability in attaining the ultimate liberation, she complained about having too little time for spiritual practice (she was a school teacher). As the result, she doubted her chance of attaining *arahantship* in this very life.



Since the Pāli scripture, the *Cullavagga*, declares that women are capable of attaining *arahantship*, it is intriguing how Sri Lankan nuns relate this achievable *arahantship* theory with the question about whether women have inferior karma to men. SN12's and SN16's statements indicate that women's ability in attaining nirvāna could be used as the basis to refute the idea of women having inferior karma, which is the focus of discussion in the previous section. This association between women's karma and women's attainment of the ultimate goal appears to be closely linked. For example, an elderly *bhikkhunī* pointed out,

This question is never a gender one. Women can become *arahant*, as an example given in . . . Therī.<sup>27</sup> There is no difference in birth but only the efforts. Men and women are equal in spiritual powers. Ideals are common to all. So is suffering and so is understanding. We can't tell whether we have committed sins. This idea that you become a female because of one's sins arises out of Hindu influence. But I don't believe that.

(SN17, in English, age 83, ordained for 18 years)

Hence, a nun who believes in women's ability to attain the ultimate goal is more likely to reject the idea that women have inferior karma to men. That is, if both women and men can attain *arahantship*, it naturally follows that women's karma is not in any way inferior to men, because negative karma prevents one from the attainment of *arahantship*. As Sri Lankans appeared to be familiar with stories of female *arahants*, it seems that Buddhist women in Sri Lanka have great claims for gender equality in the religious realm.

On the other hand, because Mahāyāna Buddhism aspires to Buddhahood rather than *arahantship*, stories of Mahāpajāptī, Sanghamittā, and the *Therīgāthā* may not act as inspirations for Mahāyāna Buddhist women. It would seem that Taiwanese Buddhist women have more to deal with in the issue of women's spiritual ability than Sri Lankan Buddhist women, though it is interesting to note that in spite of the different goals, my Taiwanese questionnaire respondents overwhelmingly agreed that women can attain Buddhahood: 74.4 percent out of the 492 responses agreed that one can become Buddha in a woman's body, while only 9.7 percent disagreed.<sup>28</sup> Yet, judging by the explanations provided by some of the respondents, it seems that the story of the Nāga princess, cited in the previous section, is used by many respondents as the basis for agreeing or disagreeing with the question. In other words, while some of the nuns found the story of the Nāga princess a proof of women's ability of attaining Buddhahood, other nuns found that the mention of sexual transformation made it difficult to agree that women could become Buddhas. Intriguingly, although my question is whether one can become Buddha in a 'woman's

Table 8 Gender-related concepts among Taiwanese respondents

<i>Do you agree that women were born women because they have less merit than men?</i>	<i>Do you agree that one can become a Buddha in a woman's body?</i>				
	<i>Yes, I agree</i>	<i>No, I don't agree</i>	<i>I don't know/ I am not sure</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Yes, I agree	35.5	70.8	30.0	35.7	50.0
No, I don't agree	51.4	20.8	16.7	28.6	10.0
I don't know	0.8	2.1	10.0	3.6	0.0
Other	11.5	6.3	43.3	32.1	0.0
No answer	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	40.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	366	48	30	28	20

body' (*nüshen*), and despite the implication of sex transformation in the story, many Taiwanese nuns still think that the story of the Nāga princess proves women's ability to attain Buddhahood. I suspect that because 'attaining Buddhahood in a woman's body' (*nüshen chengfo*) is such a catch phrase, some of my Taiwanese respondents may not have taken a moment to think about the exact implication of the phrase, and what they actually meant was 'women can attain Buddhahood'. Thus, in that women can be transformed into a male body to attain Buddhahood, certainly 'women can attain Buddhahood'.

Furthermore, Table 8 reveals a strong correlation between the idea of women's karma and women's ability to attain Buddhahood. It shows that 51.4 percent of respondents who agree with women's ability to attain Buddhahood also disagree that women have inferior karma to men, and 70.8 percent of respondents who disagree with women's ability to attain Buddhahood also agree that women have inferior karma to men. In terms of the relationship between age and gender-related concepts, similar to the relationship between age and the idea of women's karma (Table 7), there does not seem to be a correlation between age and the belief in women's ability to attain Buddhahood (Table 9). Evidently, these two gender-related concepts are closely related.

However, as described in the *Jātaka*, one needs an indefinite number of rebirths before reaching Buddhahood. For many nuns, the question of gender and Buddhahood simply seems too trivial to be worried about. A Taiwanese nun admitted:

Uh . . . personally, I have never thought about the question of Buddhahood. Even for a monk, Buddhahood is also something very distant. For me personally, I would only question the efforts

Table 9 Taiwanese responses to the question: 'Do you agree that one can become Buddha in a woman's body?'

Age	<20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	>61	No answer
Yes, I agree	0.0	78.6	74.8	71.5	72.7	100.0	100.0
No, I don't agree	0.0	8.3	10.6	9.5	11.4	0.0	0.0
I don't know/not sure	100.0	4.8	7.1	5.7	4.5	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	5.9	4.5	7.6	4.5	0.0	0.0
No answer	0.0	2.4	3.0	5.7	6.9	0.0	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	1	84	198	158	44	6	1

that I have made rather than the harvest that I might get. Let's talk about only this very life; do not talk about something so far away. I feel that if each day I can achieve more tranquility in my mind and less attachment in my action, I have progressed. Then, how can Buddhahood be impossible? But, let's not think about it so much! I have never thought about the gender issue. But I believe that as life evolves, sex differentiation will eventually disappear. We have sex difference because of our karma. Only if there exists a notion of sexes in your consciousness may that sex differentiation arise.

(TN3, age 40, newly ordained)

TN3's statement reveals an interesting point. It shows the discrepancy between Buddhists and scholars of scriptural Buddhism. For a Buddhist (e.g. TN3), the important concerns are likely to be something practical and achievable in the spiritual practices at the immediate future (e.g. 'if each day I can achieve more tranquility in my mind and less attachment in my action') rather than issues that seem distant (Buddhahood). Scholars of scriptural Buddhism, on the other hand, may be more concerned about hermetical/philosophical implications that are put to them in written words than religious actions that are carried out in everyday life. I realized this gap shortly after my fieldwork began. Throughout my fieldwork, I often felt foolish for asking the hermetical questions (about women's karma and the ultimate goals). As much as these questions are often discussed by Western feminists (e.g. Gross 1993), it soon became apparent to me that these issues are trivial to the nuns. The nuns are more concerned about issues that are achievable in the present life than things in the past (karma) or in the future (Buddhahood). After all, if a nun cannot achieve tranquility in her mind and non-attachment in her actions at the present moment, the talk of the

ultimate liberation (*arahantship* or Buddhahood) would appear to be futile. Unless a nun is also an academic, the issues discussed in this chapter might seem irrelevant to her.

In other words, intellectualists, who are particularly familiar with literary discourse, might sometimes forget that written words do not form every part of a person's religious life. In addition, selecting and reading scriptures are subjective human activities, constantly changing throughout history. In the case of contemporary Taiwan, scriptural writings that deny women's attainment to Buddhahood might be outweighed by the popularity (and thus influence) of the *Diamond Sūtra* and other popular Madhyamaka texts (e.g. the *Heart Sūtra*), which state that sexual appearance/distinction is nothing but illusion. For example, a Taiwanese nun said:

I don't think [that women have inferior karma]. I don't think that women's karma is inferior! Karma, everybody has karma. Karma is action. In other words, if you don't behave properly, or if you don't look deeply enough into yourself, and then you blame karma for every unfortunate [thing that happens in your life], it is something that I cannot agree. Obtaining Buddhahood in a woman's body? Even the Nāga girl needs to transform into a man. Personally, I don't think the *sūtra* ever mention becoming a Buddha in a woman's body. However, in my thinking, you must transcend the appearance. There is no such thing as men or women! Take Bodhisattva Guanyin as an example. He/she appears in a woman's body. Guanyin has already attained Buddhahood in his/her previous life. So, why does he/she want to appear as a woman? Isn't he/she telling us that women can obtain Buddhahood? That's right: I can't agree that women cannot obtain Buddhahood. It is not absolute. We Taiwanese *bhikkhuni* are all very capable. In my opinion, it is a Taiwanese miracle. It is a miracle. Many monks depend on nuns for success.

(TN2, age 53, ordained for 19 years)

TN2's statement shows that religious ideas are not always limited to scriptures, which, throughout the most part of history, were largely controlled by men. Although TN2 was aware that Buddhist scriptures never mention Buddhahood in a female body, she did not completely accept such a limitation on women's ability to attainment. She used the popular *Bodhisattva* Guanyin as an example to argue for women's ability for the attainment of Buddhahood. Because Mandarin is a gender-neutral language, TN2 might even have an asexual being in mind when she mentioned Guanyin. Although Guanyin (the *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara*) might appear in a male form elsewhere, it is common for Chinese Buddhism to portray Guanyin in a female form (Reed 1985; Paul, 1979: 247–254). Since Guanyin is among

the most popular deities in Taiwan (Chiu 1997: 607–612), Taiwanese Buddhist women are not totally deprived of female role models. They, like TN2, might find the image of Guanyin inspiring and empowering. Therefore, while Faure, by using medieval Japanese Buddhist teachings as evidence (2003), argues that feminists often do not go into enough depth to disclose misogynous elements in Buddhism, I would suggest that one cannot simply assume all Buddhist women would passively accept whatever was taught in medieval Japan. As Harrison finds that what is in the scriptures does not always correspond with what Buddhists believe (1998: 565), Buddhist teachings from a certain spatial and temporal context might be selected and read differently by different people. TN2's statement above shows that women are capable of constructing their own religious ideas for their own interests, and women might form their own religious ideas that deviate from Buddhist teachings of another spatial and temporal context (e.g. medieval Japan).

More significantly, the doctrine of emptiness/egolessness seems to have a great influence on the way my Taiwanese samples regard the relationship between women and the attainment of Buddhahood. One Taiwanese survey respondent simply writes: 'Buddhahood is formless' (TN, age 51–60, ordained for 11–20 years). Another Taiwanese survey respondent points out, 'When one accumulates enough merit to attain Buddhahood, he/she already has the power to appear in male or female body at will. The question of whether women can attain Buddhahood is an absurd talk, a concern of petty mortals' (TN, age 41–50, ordained for 11–20 years). Apparently, the doctrine of emptiness/egolessness enables one to refute the suggestion that one can only attain Buddhahood in a male body, since according to the doctrine, neither female body nor male body is real.

### *Summary*

This section has shown that because Theravāda Buddhism aspires to *arahantship*, the question of women's ability to attain the ultimate goal is less problematic in Sri Lanka than in Taiwan, because numerous Pāli canons contain stories of female *arahants*. This in turn confirms the argument put forward by Sri Lankan nuns, which refutes the idea that women have inferior karma. Even though Chinese scriptures are not exactly friendly to women since many Chinese scriptures contain statements that deny the attainment of Buddhahood in a female body, given the popularity of Madhyamaka teachings in contemporary Taiwan (e.g. the *Diamond Sūtra*, the doctrine of emptiness/egolessness), there is a tendency among Taiwanese Buddhist nuns to argue for the asexuality of Buddhahood. This not only proves that the selecting and reading of scriptures are subjective human activities (e.g. emphasizing Madhyamaka teachings over others), but it also

proves that despite contradictions among Chinese scriptures, Taiwanese Buddhist nuns are still able to find scriptural affirmation of women's ability to the ultimate goal in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

### The Eight Special Rules

Many others elaborated the eight special rules that, according to the legend, the Buddha had imposed on the women as a price for allowing them to found their order. These provided that the women would be permanently subordinated to the men.

(Falk 1989: 159)

The Eight Special Rules are one element in Buddhism frequently criticized by feminists. As the statement above shows, the Eight Special Rules are usually seen as a condemnation that subordinates Buddhist nuns permanently to monks. This section will discuss the issue of the Eight Special Rules and how Buddhist nuns in contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan deal with them.

### *Scripture*

First, I wish to point out that the English term 'Eight Special Rules' is adopted from Rita Gross (1993). Another possible interpretation of the Pāli term, *Garudharma*, means 'Eight Respectful Rules'. This is the same meaning as its common Chinese version, *Bajingfa*. However, as *Garudharma/Bajingfa* is often criticized for being misogynous, I would rather not call them 'respectful', so I adopt Rita Gross's version, 'Eight Special Rules'.

Both Pāli and Chinese scriptures contain the story of the Eight Special Rules:

[The Buddha said:]

'If, Ānanda, the Gōtami, Pajāpti the Great, accepts eight important rules, that may be ordination for her:

'A nun who has been ordained (even) for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day. And this rule is to be honored, respected, revered, venerated, never to be transgressed during her life.

'A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there is no monk. . . .

'Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of monks: the asking (as to the date) of the Observance day, and the coming for the exhortation. . . .

‘After the rains a nun must be ‘invited’ before both Orders in respect of three matters: what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected. . . .

‘A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo *mānatta* (discipline) for half a month before both Orders. . . .

‘When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six rules for two years, she should seek ordination from both Orders. . . .

‘A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun. . . .

‘From today admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns is not forbidden. . . .

‘If, Ānanda, the Gōtami, Pajāpatī the Great, accepts these eight important rules, that may be ordination for her.’

Then the venerable Ānanda, having learnt the eight important rules from the Lord, approached the Gōtami, Pajāpatī the Great. . . .

[Answered Gotami, Pajāpatī the Great:]

‘Even, honoured Ānanda, as a woman or a man when young, of tender years, and fond of ornaments, having washed (himself and his) head, having obtained a garland of lotus flowers or garland of jasmine flowers or a garland of some sweet-scented creeper, having taken it with both hands, should place it on the top of his head – even so do I, honoured Ānanda, accept these eight important rules never to be transgressed during my life.’

(*Cullavagga* X, (1))<sup>29</sup>

The requirements that demand a senior nun to pay homage to a junior monk, to seek instruction from monks and dual ordination for the nuns,<sup>30</sup> etc. appear to be restrictions upon the nuns that place the nuns in a lower position than monks in the religious hierarchy.

Buddhist scholars have tried to understand why the Buddha, whose teachings are primarily egalitarian, should set down such seemingly sexist rules. Much attention is paid to the patriarchal social conditions in ancient India, pointing out that total equality between nuns’ orders and monks’ orders might reduce the laity’s support for Buddhist sangha since the social norm prevailed at the time demanded the subordination of women (e.g. Wijayaratna 2001: 56–57). Some question the very historicity of the Buddhist canon about these rules, or how the construction of Buddhist canons might have been influenced by various cultural elements throughout history, making the authenticity of Buddhist views on sex and gender dubious (e.g. Sponberg 1985). Others argue that the Eight Special Rules present only institutional subordination and no inherent barrier to women’s spiritual development (e.g. Gross 1993: 37).

Yet, lay scholars are not the ones who have to live with the Eight Special Rules; it is the Buddhist monks and nuns who have to deal with them in their daily lives. For Taiwanese *bhikkhuni* Wu-yin, it is important to



differentiate between ‘the fundamental teachings of the *Buddhadharma* and cultural customs and taboos’ (2001: 89). Accordingly, the Eight Special Rules merely reflect the inferior social status of women in ancient India and the fact that ancient Indian women were less likely to receive education than men, so the Eight Special Rules give *bhikkhu* the responsibility to aid and support *bhikkhunī* sangha (Wu-yin Bhikshuni 2001: 81–89). By comparing various Pāli canons and Sinhala chronicles, Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, finds great inconsistency in the claims of the Eight Special Rules (2000). Not only is there no mention of the Eight Special Rules in the Sinhala chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, but also the Vinaya texts show incidents that caused some of the rules included among the Eight Special Rules to be laid down much later than Mahāpajāpati’s ordination. Hence, some of the rules could not have been laid down at the time of Mahāpajāpati’s ordination. *Bhikkhunī* Kusuma further argues that even if the Eight Special Rules were given at the time of Mahāpajāpati’s ordination, only Mahāpajāpati had accepted the rules and other *bhikkhunī* need not observe the rules (2000). Additionally, Taiwanese *bhikkhu* Sheng-Yen points out that, given the social conditions in the Chinese Buddhist culture, it is impossible to observe all of the Eight Special Rules because some conditions under which the rules apply, such as the raining season retreat, are no longer observed by every Chinese sangha. He further points out that the Eight Special Rules do not imply that a monk necessarily has higher status than nuns, for only a *bhikkhu* who meets certain prerequisites (e.g. ordained for more than twenty years and well-learned in Dharma and the Vinaya) might give instructions to nuns. As such, the Eight Special Rules cannot be used as a basis to claim *bhikkhu*’s superiority over *bhikkhunī* (1999a: 88–90). It seems that unlike lay scholars, who are more concerned with the ideological implications of the Eight Special Rules (e.g. sexism), Buddhist monks and nuns are more concerned with the applicability of the Eight Special Rules in their daily life. This difference shows that a discourse or a method of analysis is usually subjective – influenced by personal experience and interest – no matter how ‘objective’ the person who carries out the discourse or analysis wishes it to be.

It is not the interest of this research to focus on the hermetical debate. This research is interested in the influence of the Eight Special Rules on the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Yet, before I move on to discuss the fieldwork findings, I must mention a social movement that profoundly affected my Taiwanese findings.

### *The controversy*

When I began my fieldwork in Taiwan in November 2001, I unwittingly walked into a controversy, the emotional fallout of which was still palpable. My nun informants seemed to feel obligated to take sides in this



controversy. Undoubtedly, this controversy had a deep impact on my Taiwanese fieldwork. Had I conducted the fieldwork prior to the controversy, the results might be very different.

The media generally called this controversy the ‘abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm’ (*fei Bajingfa fengbo*). It took place at a conference on 31 March 2001, in which *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui led a group of monks, nuns, laywomen and laymen, and tore apart posters that had the Eight Special Rules written on them. By so doing, she declared that the Eight Special Rules were thus abolished and called this act ‘Mahāpajāpati’s second revolution’. It was clear that from the very beginning, this act was going to cause controversy, as some of the conference attendants immediately raised opposition against *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui’s action, questioning whether this act was appropriate for this particular occasion, and whether *bhikkhu* Yinshun had been informed of it.<sup>31</sup> *Bhikkhu* Yinshun, because of his scholarly works, age, and the influence of his ‘Buddhism for the human realm’ ideal was often sought after when a dispute among Buddhists occurred. The quasi-official Buddhist organization, BAROC, quickly wrote to *bhikkhu* Yinshun, asking his interpretation of the Eight Special Rules. *Bhikkhu* Yinshun replied on 3 June:

I have received your letter. The problem caused by the Eight Special Rules was almost unexpected, because they were laid down by the Buddha. If the Eight Special Rules are no longer compatible with our time and social context, we need the consent of the majority of the elders [*changlao*] and the resolution passed through a grand council.

(quoted from Chuandao Shi 2002: 73–74)

Subsequently, however, *bhikkhu* Yinshun’s reply was used by both sides as the basis to support or denounce *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui’s action. One of the reasons is that in his earlier works, *bhikkhu* Yinshun has questioned the historicity and the necessity to observe the Eight Special Rules in contemporary contexts.<sup>32</sup> But his reply, as quoted above, stated that the Eight Special Rules were laid down by the Buddha, and some of *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui’s supporters found this later interpretation, which contradicted his earlier interpretation, difficult to accept.<sup>33</sup>

*Bhikkhuni* Zhaohui was no stranger to controversy. Born in Myanmar in 1956, she moved to Taiwan in 1965 and entered the Buddhist nuns’ order in 1978. She came to media attention around 1988 when she began to lead various social actions that aimed at protecting Buddhism. Soon she expanded her social actions beyond Buddhist causes to animal rights, anti-nuclear power plant movements, etc.<sup>34</sup> According to her, the cause of the ‘abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm’ could be traced back to 1992, when a group of *bhikkhu*, whom she calls ‘*bhikkhu* chauvinists’, began to

write in a Buddhist magazine, *Sengqie Zazhi*,<sup>35</sup> to promote the Eight Special Rules, and even went as far as requesting *bhikkhunī* of their sangha to memorize and imitate ‘the eighty-four ugly gestures of women’.<sup>36</sup> In her own words, she began to write articles attacking those ‘*bhikkhu* chauvinists’ in order to prevent *bhikkhunī* being brainwashed by them. Eventually, her protest culminated in her public denouncement of the Eight Special Rules (Zhaohui, Shi, 2002: 66).<sup>37</sup> Therefore, in tearing up the posters, she was in a sense confirming and ensuring a denouncement that had taken place some years earlier, rather than attempting to start a fresh controversy.

Being a social activist, *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui is inevitably a controversial figure. Throughout my fieldwork in Taiwan, I encountered many informants who doubted the motivation behind my research; some even questioned why I wanted to ‘move alongside Zhaohui’. One Taiwanese nun said:

So, in my opinion, these who are arguing whether the Eight Special Rules is applicable all have nothing better to do. Both sides are establishments and both sides have their own ‘power’. [All you need to do is] not to observe it! If you don’t want to observe [the Eight Special Rules] but worry that people might criticize you, so you try to abolish it; then that’s a dubious intent. It’s meaningless! In cases when you don’t regard the Eight Special Rules as significant and are certain that you are not arrogant, so as long as you don’t worry about other people accusing you of being arrogant, there is no need for you to pay homage to *bhikkhu*. Even if other people accuse you of being arrogant, you wouldn’t care. You cannot want to not observe [the Eight Special Rules] but worry that other people might accuse you of being arrogant, so you try to abolish the Eight Special Rules. That’s a bizarre action! . . . I observe [the Eight Special Rules]! The problem is that we would not pay homage to *bhikkhu* wherever and whenever we meet them. That’s terribly meaningless! [If that were the case], I would tell *bhikkhu* not to go out at all. . . . But if it were a proper occasion, then I would not mind paying homage [to *bhikkhu*]. Even if you want me to kowtow [to *bhikkhu*] for ten times, I would not mind.

(TN5, age 40, ordained for 6 years)

TN5’s statement shows a resentment towards the ‘abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm’ and perhaps a hint of disapproval towards *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui. I frequently heard of this kind of comment during my fieldwork in Taiwan. Nearly all of my nun informants, regardless of whether they accept the Eight Special Rules or not, expressed disapproval towards *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui’s action.

One reason for the resentment might be due to the sharp language adopted by *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui and her supporters. Their blunt criticisms of their opponents, including some well-respected senior monks, created factions in Taiwanese Buddhist circles and made many Buddhists uneasy. For example, *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui writes,

The few *bhikkhu* . . . attendants at the conference that day stirred up things by holding on to the excuse of whether I had *bhikkhu* Yinshun's permission. Some *bhikkhu* from BAROC were so angry that they wrote to *bhikkhu* Yinshun, forcing him to take sides, and hoping this might criminalize me. But this only makes clearer the fact that men in Buddhism are reluctant to give up their privileges, and even further proves that my agitation is not groundless. This is 'Rebellion is reasonable; revolution is righteous'. The Dalai Lama,<sup>38</sup> after all, has seen the world and his brain is clearer than those useless *bhikkhu*. He knew that he had a hot potato in his hand, so he quickly kicked away the ball, [by saying that] this issue is complicated and he cannot decide alone. [He suggested] a council with *bhikkhu* representatives from Theravāda and Tibetan traditions to discuss this issue. But, all crows are equally black.<sup>39</sup> Theravāda *bhikkhu* oppress women even more than Tibetan *bhikkhu*. Isn't having a council with Theravāda and Tibetan *bhikkhu* representatives to decide the fate of female renunciants like asking a group of wolves to decide the fate of little chicks?

(2002: 70)

In the few sentences above, *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui criticizes some eminent Taiwanese monks ('*bhikkhu* from BAROC'), the Dalai Lama, and probably all Theravāda *bhikkhu*. Hence, it is not difficult to see why her actions, or rather, the sharp language she and her supporters adopt, should make Taiwanese Buddhists uneasy.

Additionally, a senior nun told me that the resentment towards *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui among Buddhist nuns largely rose from her method of agitation:

So, I would say: 'Her appeal was right, but her method was wrong.' As a result, her appeal became a mess. Originally, her appeal had a good intention, and her criticism of [those '*bhikkhu* chauvinists'] was right. But most people cannot accept the method she used. . . . if you based your appeal on theory, or to hold a conference so that both men and women could discuss together calmly, then perhaps everybody would accept the result. . . . However, what Zhaohui did was to give everybody an excuse to attack [this appeal]. Why? She used the method of tearing apart [the rules]! In the Buddhist tradition, the Vinaya is sacred and should not be

stained. But she openly called people to tear apart [the Eight Special Rules] in public. . . . She called four people to tear apart [the posters with the Eight Special Rules written on], one *bhikkhu*, one *bhikkhunī*, one layman, and one laywoman. Many people were against this action. It makes sense to call *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* [to tear apart the rules] because these are *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhunī* precepts. But what right did [she] have to ask the laity to tear apart the rules? Am I right? It has nothing to do with the laity! In traditional Buddhism, the laity did not have any right to interfere with the monastic affairs. There must be a distinction. It's just like no one should interfere in the domestic affairs of your family. . . . Whether or not the monastics should observe the *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhunī* precepts is up to the monastic themselves, not to the laity. . . . Additionally, the occasion and time [for the action] was not appropriate. This is why there was so much counteraction. She made a big issue out of it and gained lots of fame. . . . I don't feel what she did benefited her appeal. But I completely agree with her appeal.

(TN13, age 59, ordained for 26 years)

It seems that there was indeed a great amount of negative reaction against *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui's public denouncement of the Eight Special Rules. As TN13 pointed out, the result created by 'the storm' may not be entirely positive. According to a monk informant, because of the numeral dominance of nuns in Taiwan, a monk seldom dares to ask a nun to pay homage to him, and the Eight Special Rules had been treated as if non-existent. After 'the storm' this 'silent conspiracy' was broken, and a monk must now ponder whether he should ask a nun to pay homage to him or run the risk of being accused of not observing the precepts. If this indeed was a common reaction among Taiwanese monks, then it is sad that a feminist action may have caused such anti-feminist consequences. It is curious why a group of monks should try to reinforce the Eight Special Rules. Very few of my nun informants seemed to know about that group of monks, and not all of them were aware of the background behind the 'abolishing the Eight Special Rules storm'. But the few of them who had heard about this particular group of *bhikkhu*, labeled as '*bhikkhu* chauvinists' by *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui, expressed great dismay toward them. One nun angrily told me that those particular *bhikkhu* pride themselves as Vinaya masters and demand that everyone rigidly follow the Vinaya rules, including rules such as the Eight Special Rules that are commonly deemed unnecessary or impossible to observe in contemporary Taiwan. She and another elderly nun seemed gravely concerned that the young nuns in the same sangha as those *bhikkhu* might be brainwashed by the monks and eventually lose their ability to think independently.

The aftermath of ‘the storm’ may account for the hostility I experienced in my Taiwanese fieldwork. I often had to take pains to explain to my Taiwanese informants that I was away from Taiwan when ‘the storm’ occurred and had been unaware of it until my Taiwanese fieldwork started. I also had to explain to them that my interviews and questionnaire were designed without the consideration of *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui’s agitation and were largely based on Western feminist criticism of Buddhism. Few of my Taiwanese nun informants were aware that Western (feminist) criticism of the Eight Special Rules might be traced back to as early as 1930 in I.B. Horner’s *Women Under Primitive Buddhism: laywomen and almswomen*. It seemed that at the time of my fieldwork, many of my nun informants were still emotional about ‘the storm’ and felt compelled to take sides, so much so that sometimes I found it difficult to tell whether my nun informants were expressing approval of the Eight Special Rules or disapproval of *bhikkhunī* Zhaohui. Clearly, my Taiwanese findings would have been very different had my fieldwork begun prior to ‘the storm’.

### *The first rule*

Due to the scope of this book, I am unable to discuss all of the eight rules. Therefore, I will focus only one – the first rule. The choice of the first rule is simple: it is one rule that many of my nun informants spoke about at some length. One incident especially made a deep impression on me. It was the interview with an elderly Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* (SN17).<sup>40</sup> After the interview was over and I had already switched off the tape recorder, she suddenly lapsed into a deep contemplation, murmuring, ‘I have no problem with all other rules. But I don’t understand why a one-hundred-year-old *bhikkhunī* must worship a young *bhikkhu*.’ Given her age, it was not difficult to understand why the requirement for an old nun to pay homage to a young monk should bother her so much. Nevertheless, I was very struck by her reaction, so I chose the first rule for discussion.

Apparently, SN17 was not the first elderly nun to feel uncomfortable about the first rule. It is said that the first Buddhist nun, Mahāpajāpatī, had raised objection against the first rule, too:

Then the [Gōtami], Pajāpatī the Great approached the venerable Ānanda; having approached, having greeted the venerable Ānanda, she stood at a respectful distance. As she was standing at a respectful distance, the [Gōtami], Pajāpatī the Great spoke thus to the venerable Ānanda: ‘I, honored Ānanda, asking one boon from the Lord: It were well, Lord, if the Lord would allow greeting, standing up for, salutation and the proper duties between monks and nuns according to seniority.’

Then the venerable Ānanda approached the Lord; having approached, having greeted the Lord, he sat down at a respectful distance. As he was sitting down at a respectful distance, the venerable Ānanda spoke thus to the Lord: ‘Lord, the [Gōtami], Pajāpati the Great spoke thus: ‘I, honoured Ānanda, am asking one boon . . . according to seniority.’

‘This is impossible, Ānanda, it cannot come to pass, that the Truth-finder should allow greeting, standing up for, salutation and the proper duties between monks and nuns according to seniority. Ānanda, these followers of other sects, although liable to poor guardianship, will not carry out greeting, standing up for, salutation and proper duties towards women, so how should the Truth-finder allow greeting . . . and proper duties towards women?’ Then the Lord, on this occasion, having given reasoned talk, addressed the monks, saying:

‘Monks, one should not carry out greeting, rising up for salutation and proper duties towards women. Whoever should carry out (one of these), there is an offence of wrong-doing.’

(*Cullavagga X (3)*)<sup>41</sup>

According to this quotation from the *Cullavagga*, the Buddha not only denied Mahāpajāpati’s request that homage between monks and nuns should be based on seniority rather than sex but also prohibited monks to pay homage to nuns. Yet, the reason given by the Buddha mentioned nothing about any possible difference in the spiritual capacities between the two sexes. The Buddha merely pointed out that followers of other sects did not pay homage to others on the basis of seniority. It seems that the Buddha was concerned about how Buddhist sangha might be perceived by society. Since Buddhist sangha relied on lay donations for survival, the Buddha is somehow regarded as being diplomatic towards the wider society, aiming not to alienate lay supporters who may not be able to accept values that were too far removed from the patriarchal social norm.

Before I even began my analysis on the fieldwork findings, I became puzzled by what exactly is said in the scriptures. While in I.B. Horner’s translation, as quoted above, it is ‘proper homage’ that a *bhikkhuni* has to pay to a *bhikkhu*, *bhikkhuni* Kusuma translates it as, ‘rise, greet respectfully, and bow down<sup>42</sup> before a *bhikkhu*’ (2000: 6). According to Kate Crosby, I.B. Horner’s translation is more accurate, and she suggests translating the first rule as follows:

A nun who has been ordained at the higher ordination for a hundred years must greet, stand up for, place the hands together in honor for, and perform the appropriate gestures of the respect for a monk who has received his higher ordination that day.<sup>43</sup>

Hence, it is not 'bowing down' or 'kneeling down' to a *bhikkhu* that is required from a *bhikkhunī*. It is 'the appropriate gestures' (that is, according to the custom) that are required from a *bhikkhunī*. In addition, it is necessary to point out that although contemporary *bhikkhunī* orders in Sri Lanka might be revived from Taiwanese sangha, for the purpose of maintaining Theravāda integrity, it is the Pāli *Cullavagga*, rather than the Chinese *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*, that is observed by contemporary Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī*.

While it is 'the appropriate gestures' that are required of nuns in the Pāli Vinaya, the Chinese interpretation of the first special rule can be disputed. Both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Vinayas had been translated into Chinese (Heirman 2003; Yifa 2002: 3–52). Seven versions of the Eight Special Rules exist in the Chinese scriptures. This may not be a surprise, given that Buddhist scriptures were translated into Chinese by many people throughout several centuries. The correct version of the Vinaya rules was so important that it was the main motivation for many monks traveling to South Asia in search of Buddhist texts (Mizuno 1982: 41–133). The problem is that each version differs from the others slightly. Most strikingly different is the *Mahāsan-gha Vinaya*, for it goes into an unusual length in detailing the first rule:

Although a *bhikkhunī* has been ordained for a hundred years, she must stand up and pay homage to a newly ordained *bhikkhu*. She cannot say, 'Treat me as ordained for a hundred years' and then pay homage to the *bhikkhu*. All *bhikkhunī* must stand up and pay homage to senior, middle-aged or young *bhikkhu*. When a *bhikkhunī* visits a *bhikkhu* monastery, she must pay homage to all *bhikkhu* one by one by touching each *bhikkhu*'s feet with her face and head. If a *bhikkhunī* is too old and unwell, she must try the best of her physical strength to pay her homage to as many *bhikkhu* as possible. As to the rest, she may pay homage to them as a group saying, 'I, *bhikkhunī* so and so, prostrate to all *bhikkhu* by touching your feet with my head and face.' When a *bhikkhu* visits a *bhikkhunī* nunnery, all *bhikkhunī* must stand up and pay homage to the *bhikkhu* by touching his feet.<sup>44</sup>

No other version of the first special rule goes into such lengthy details. The unusual length in the *Mahāsan-gha Vinaya* suggests that its author or Chinese translator was obsessed with regulating the nuns. However, it is the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* that is observed in Chinese Buddhism (Wu-yin 2001: 48) and its version of the first special rule might be interpreted differently: 'When a *bhikkhunī* who has been ordained for a hundred years sees a newly ordained *bhikkhu*, she must stand up, welcome him, *wenxun libai* and



invite him to sit down.<sup>45</sup> According to the modern dictionary, *Ding Fubao Dictionary for Buddhist Studies*,<sup>46</sup> *wenxun* means inquiring one's well-being orally, and *libai* is the Chinese term for the Sanskrit word, *namaskāra*. The word *namaskāra* itself means 'homage-paying'.<sup>47</sup> Significant is that, according to a twelfth-century Buddhist dictionary (that is, closer to the time when the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya* was translated) the Chinese Buddhist term for *namaskāra* – *libai* – refers to various ways of homage-paying: from oral inquiry to kneeling down with one's head and hands touching the ground.<sup>48</sup> In other words, technically speaking, Chinese Buddhist scripture may not demand a *bhikkhunī* to observe the first rule by kneeling down to the *bhikkhu*. Yet, contemporary Taiwanese Buddhists tend to interpret *libai* as paying respect by kneeling down, and understand the first rule as such.

It is not the interest of this research to inquire about the historicity or authenticity of scriptures, but to investigate the implications of scriptures on the daily life of Buddhist nuns. In both contemporary Taiwan and Sri Lanka, the observance of the first rule is carried out by kneeling down to the *bhikkhu*, despite the fact that, as demonstrated above, kneeling down to the *bhikkhu* is not explicitly demanded by either's scriptures.

Today, paying homage by kneeling down perhaps carries a heavier hierarchal implication in Taiwan than it does in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, it is still a common practice for people to kneel down with joined palms to superiors, elders or monastics as a way of showing respect. The laity greets the monastics by kneeling down with joined palms, and the junior monastics greet senior monastics by kneeling down with joined palms. During my stay in Sri Lanka, there were several occasions when parents or teachers told their children to kneel down before me as a way of showing respect. On the other hand, in contemporary Taiwan, kneeling down to another person (even for a junior to a senior, or for a layperson to a monastic) has become a rare practice. In other words, while in contemporary Sri Lanka, paying homage by kneeling down might still be seen as an 'appropriate gesture', in contemporary Taiwan, kneeling down to another person denotes great status difference.

### *Fieldwork findings*

Perhaps because my fieldwork was conducted after the 'abolishing Eight Special Rules storm', my Taiwanese nun informants overwhelmingly expressed their approval of the Eight Special Rules. However, for reasons stated earlier, I have to doubt whether this result was a genuine opinion or might be read as resentment against 'the storm'.

On the other hand, disapproval of the Eight Special Rules was frequently heard among my Sri Lankan informants. One Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* bluntly rejected the first special rule:



We always respect *bhikkhu*. No, [the Eight Special Rules] is no problem. . . . *Bhikkhu* should be very educated, speak very well, and then *bhikkhunī* should worship [him]. If not, *bhikkhunī* should not worship [him]. Other places [in *sūtra*] say, worship a *bhikkhu* only according to his education and knowledge. We shouldn't reject *bhikkhu*. . . . I think it is not wrong because some *bhikkhu* are not good. *Sanghamittā* is an *arahant*. But nowadays, our *bhikkhu* are not *arahants*: they are jealous and greedy. Therefore, I don't think we should worship them [unconditionally]. Some *bhikkhunī* are *arahants*, so *bhikkhu* should worship them.

(SN8, in English, age 58, ordained for 48 years)

SN8's statement shows the gap between theory and practice. Although in theory, a *bhikkhunī* must pay homage to a *bhikkhu* as the first special rule requires, SN8 was obviously confident about the spiritual capability of women that she did not see the necessity of paying homage to *bhikkhu* unconditionally.

Some nuns told me that they may observe the Eight Special Rules out of social pressure, but it is not the same as sincerely believing in it:

Since now I am a *bhikkhunī*, I don't really mind [the Eight Special Rules]. However, if a *bhikkhu* comes, then I must observe the rules. [The Eight Special Rules] were not set by Lord Buddha, and it's actually the monks' loss. After Lord Buddha passed away, some monks forged [the Eight Special Rules]. [The Eight Special Rules] say that *bhikkhunī* must go to monks' temple to get instruction once a month, and monks must take care of *bhikkhunī*. After Lord Buddha passed away, only monks enforced [the Eight Special Rules]. That's why people don't like it. It puts people down. There are some people who do not believe [the Eight Special Rules]. Lord Buddha did not despise his mother. . . . Because Lord Buddha did not discriminate against women, I think that Lord Buddha did not set down [the Eight Special Rules]. That's why I don't believe [the Eight Special Rules] wholeheartedly. I don't pay homage to *bhikkhu* in the streets. Sometimes monks would talk to me, but I don't pay homage to them in the streets. If a monk comes to my nunnery, then I would pay homage to him. When I go to monks' temple, I also pay homage to monks. No, never has a monk paid homage to me. Not all monks would ask me to pay homage to them, only some. Some monks would pay homage to me with joined-palms. . . . When you pay homage to a monk, it is not paying homage to the monk but to yourself. Some chief monks pay homage to me with joined-palms. . . . But because I am a senior nun, if I pay homage to young monks, they would feel

Table 10 Responses to the question: 'What do you think of the first rule\* of the Eight Special Rules?'

	<i>Sri Lankan bhikkhuni</i> **	<i>Taiwanese nuns</i>
Agree and would observe	67.9	51.4
Agree but would not observe	3.6	7.3
Disagree but would observe	17.9	8.3
Disagree and would not observe	0.0	11.6
Other	3.6	16.1
No answer	7.0	5.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	28	492

Notes: \* The first rule: 'Any nun, regardless of seniority, must pay homage to every monk, even if he is newly ordained.'

\*\* Because the *bhikkhuni* order is relatively new in Sri Lanka and the Eight Special Rules only concern *bhikkhuni*, non-*bhikkhuni* Sri Lankan nuns were asked not to answer this question.

uneasy. Yes, monks respect me. There is no problem [between monks and me].

(SN20, in Sinhala, age 38, ordained for 26 years)

Since SN20 did not believe that the Eight Special Rules were laid down by the Buddha, she did not believe that it was necessary to observe them. Indeed, the survey shows that there is a substantial proportion of nuns who disagree with the Eight Special Rules but feel pressured to observe them (Table 10). However, despite her challenge about the authenticity of the Eight Special Rules, out of social pressure, she still observed the rules. Significant also is that she did not observe the first rule when it contradicts the broader expectation of hierarchal conducts: 'But because I am a senior nun, if I pay homage to young monks, they would feel uneasy'. In Sri Lanka, as in most parts of South Asia, the role of mother is highly valued (see Bulbeck 1998: 97–128). As such, it may be unacceptable for a senior nun to pay homage to a junior monk, because it contradicts the social value of venerating the mother; in this case, the senior nun represents the role of the mother. This thus suggests a negotiation between the observance of the rules and the broader expectation of hierarchal conducts in society.

It is important to note in SN20's statement above that even though the first special rule requests nuns to pay homage to monks, this rule is not practiced at all occasions. Apparently, it was only at more formal occasions such as visiting each other's temples that nuns would pay homage to monks. In my observation, Sri Lankan nuns indeed did not pay homage to monks when they met in the streets, but only when they met at temples

or indoors (e.g. laity's houses). According to my Taiwanese informants, a similar custom applied in Taiwan, too. One Taiwanese nun said,

We would not pay homage to a *bhikkhu* everywhere, such as in the streets or wherever. We most certainly do not do that. Moreover, [our teacher] told us not to do that. Let me give you an example. There is a library at our temple, and many people would come there for research. Even *bhikkhu* would come, too. One day a *bhikkhu* came. When he saw our librarian, he said, 'Eh, I am a *bhikkhu*, and you're a *bhikkhunī*. Come and pay homage to me.' Our teacher only learnt about this incident later. So, she told us, 'Do not pay homage there. If a *bhikkhu* comes and says such a thing, you should say to him, "Fine, *Dharma* Master, since you want us pay homage to you, we should receive you formally. Please come to the Buddha Hall. Let me receive you formally and pay homage to you".' No, [our nun librarian] did not pay homage to him. She just didn't know what to do. She was stunned, thinking why would a *bhikkhu* behave like that. . . . Very few [monks come to our temple]. Even if a *bhikkhu* thinks that he is wellknown and wants to come here to give us instruction, we would not accept it. We are clear about this and we have full control over this issue. Why? When we see a *bhikkhu*, we would be respectful towards him. The question is how to show my respect. The monks must know what is appropriate behavior, and I also must know what is appropriate behavior. If [a monk] comes here, then we would offer a meal to him. Just like today that you came, and we offered you a meal. The only difference would be that he is a *bhikkhu*. If you say that you are a *bhikkhu* and must give us some instruction, or wants us to perform certain homage, we would not accept that.

(TN14, age 40, ordained for 12 years)

Similar to TN14's statement above, many of my Taiwanese nun informants stressed that they would pay the 'kneeling down' homage to monks only *inside* the Buddha Hall. Taiwanese Buddhists (both lay and monastic) usually greet each other with joined palms and say, 'Amitabha Buddha'. As kneeling down to another person is no longer an everyday practice in contemporary Taiwan, the Chinese version of the first special rule that might be interpreted as requiring a *bhikkhunī* to pay homage to a *bhikkhu* by kneeling down consequently appears as a form of discrimination. However, it must be pointed out that even within Taiwanese Buddhism, there exists diversity in the practice of the Eight Special Rules. While TN14's sangha may insist on paying homage only inside the Buddha Hall, other sangha may not. A Taiwanese nun of a mixed-sex sangha said,

If a *bhikkhu* comes, we must pay homage to him by kneeling down. If a *bhikkhu* is of our own sangha and we meet frequently, we would only greet each other with joined palms and say, ‘Amitabha Buddha’. Sometimes we don’t even do that. . . . When a monk comes, our nuns at the reception would first pay homage to him by kneeling down and then ask what does he want. We may ask a monk to receive him later, but our nuns at the reception would first pay homage to him by kneeling down. . . . When we see monks, we would quickly fall on our knees. But they would be very humble and say, ‘No need, no need’. No, [I have never encountered arrogant ones]. Perhaps that type of monk would not dare to come here! That’s because we are a simple and conservative sangha.

(TN8, age 50, ordained for 20 years)

Unlike TN14’s sangha, which only insists on the ‘kneeling down’ homage being practiced inside the Buddha Hall, TN8’s sangha apparently requires nuns to pay the ‘kneeling down’ homage on most occasions.

Additionally, some nuns argued that it is futile to quarrel about the Eight Special Rules. One Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* said,

We accept [the Eight Special Rules]. We have to learn that and we have to understand what the Buddha expected from us. No, [the Eight Special Rules] give us no trouble. No trouble. Some people imagine that it is not necessary or [was invented later]. Whatever the case, don’t argue. Don’t argue with the *Dharma*. *Dharma* is very clear. . . . At [the Buddha’s] time, [men and women] became equal by their mentality. They entered the Path through meditation. That is true. But [the Buddha] didn’t expect now that the nuns go about to say, ‘we are higher than you’. Your own development and your own achievement, you can’t show it. If we practice and be honest, we can be examples, be a lamp to yourself as well as the world. We can be an example. That’s all . . . Uh . . . [thinking about my question of whether the Eight Special Rules is discrimination]. It doesn’t matter, because of our aim. It is just a symbol. Our aim is nirvāna, so it doesn’t matter. Even if you have obtained nirvāna, you still get to pay respect to a monk who is low, who is not developed himself. That is the Buddha’s law. Don’t argue. We can’t go beyond that.

(SN12, in English, age 52, ordained for 6 years)

Like many Buddhists, SN12 saw the Eight Special Rules as sacred (‘that is the Buddha’s law’) and not to be challenged. However, she also understood Buddhism as an individualistic practice and the aim of Buddhists should be nirvāna. As such, the question of whether the Eight Special Rules

is discrimination became meaningless since nirvāna is achieved individually regardless of institutional situation. In fact, some nuns considered that the observance of the Eight Special Rules benefits the nuns rather than the monks. One Taiwanese nun said,

[The Eight Special Rules] is not commonly observed [in Taiwan]. To be honest, [if you see a monk], it's up to you whether you pay homage or not. In fact, there are two dimensions in this issue. From the secular perspective, if you're willing to kneel down, it means, 'This is my respect, my ethics'. If you're not willing to kneel down, it means, 'Our predestined relationship is not enough. Let me greet you with joined palms'. But in fact, the meaning of kneeling down is that, 'May I receive your teachings?' Do you think in this action the actor receives more benefit or the receiver? What do you think? You are the real operator of this action, so you receive more benefit yourself. You receive respect and then you erase arrogance in yourself. In other words, this action itself does not symbolize hierarchy or status. You benefit more than the other party. If the other party does not have enough spiritual practice and he lets you kneel down to him, he will only fall quickly. If he has enough spiritual practice, of course he is worthy of your respect. . . . [If a nun feels low self-esteem as the result of the Eight Special Rules], then she must practice more in *Dharma*. It is very clear in *Dharma*: there is no discrimination among all beings. One who has faith in *Dharma* knows that the Buddha is not the only Lord. Everyone is a future Buddha, and every Buddha was once a being. Today I am a woman, a being. I practice, and after practice I will one day be capable of helping others. I will become a living *bodhisattva*, using wisdom and compassion to help others. So how can there be a difference in status? It's because of different levels and different time and different conditions that we play different roles. . . . Everything is interdependent. If you appear to have low self-esteem and do not respect yourself, the only reaction you would receive is other people's disrespect. . . . You are tied by your ideology, your arrogance. I am not tied by arrogance or my low self-esteem. I wish you well and wish your mind will not be troubled, so I pay homage to you by kneeling down. By preventing you from making bad karma [through having bad thoughts], I accumulate merit.

(TN9, in her 40s, ordained for 19 years)

TN9 eloquently argued that the Eight Special Rules benefit the nuns, because they help to liberate the nuns from arrogance and the conventional idea of hierarchy. For her, the homage of kneeling down to monks

should be seen as a spiritual practice on the nuns' part, rather than a symbolic gesture showing the low status of nuns. However, she also said that the Eight Special Rules were not commonly observed in Taiwan and she had rarely met anyone who required her to observe the rules. It is possible then that, were she in a situation where the Eight Special Rules were strictly and rigidly enforced, she may think otherwise.

Finally, it is important not to perceive a society or tradition as static. For example, one Taiwanese nun observed that:

I have been ordained for more than thirty years, going on to thirty-two years. The situation of gender inequality has changed greatly in these thirty years. . . . When I was newly ordained, the patriarchal situation was very obvious. . . . Whenever a male *Dharma* Master came to our sangha, we would welcome him with special honor. Male *Dharma* Masters were also very used to this privilege and the especial honor they received at female sangha. . . . At public occasions, the patriarchal arrangement would naturally come to be, with *bhikkhu* in the front and *bhikkhuni* in the back. Of course, this has something to do with the Eight Special Rules. [The patriarchal arrangement] is included in the Eight Special Rules. . . . However, the scholarly trend has become more open in recent years, such a situation has become rarer. . . . Based on what I have observed at public occasions, the patriarchal arrangement has become rarer. Rarer, especially among the younger ones. Usually, those who study precepts – there are many schools in Buddhism – tend to be more [patriarchal].

(TN1, in her 50s, ordained for 32 years)

TN1 revealed the gender bias in Taiwanese Buddhist institution, for not only monk visitors to her sangha were treated with special honor, but also at public occasions, *bhikkhuni* were expected to sit in a less prominent position than *bhikkhu*. Most noticeable is how her sangha, a female-only sangha, would give special honor to *bhikkhu*. This is consistent with other nuns' observation that both Taiwanese laity and monastics tend to regard and treat monks better than nuns. This indicates the internalization of gender bias of at least some Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, who, for one reason or another (e.g. men have more merit than women), accept the assumption of male superiority and follow the patriarchal arrangement in their daily life. However, TN1 also observed that the situation of gender inequality had improved throughout the thirty-two years of her being a nun. Accordingly, not only does diversity exist in the religious practices within a society (e.g. TN8's and TN14's sangha have different requirements for the observance of the first special rule), but religious practices may also change over time.

*Summary*

By focusing my discussion on the first of the Eight Special Rules, I first discovered that there seems to be a discrepancy between the scriptures and practice. Regardless of which version of the rules might be observed in contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan, *bhikkhunī* in both countries observe the first rule by kneeling down to the monks. Because kneeling down to another person is still a common way of showing respect in contemporary Sri Lanka, the customary observance of the first rule by kneeling down to monks involves less divergence from the social norm and requires less consideration in Sri Lanka than in Taiwan. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that *bhikkhunī* in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan pay homage to *bhikkhu* at every single occasion when they meet. The first rule is usually observed when *bhikkhunī* and *bhikkhu* meet at temples. Some Taiwanese nuns even stress that the first rule is only observed inside of the Buddha Hall. In other words, there is a negotiation between the Eight Special Rules and convenience, the normal societal codes of conducts, and the increasing gender egalitarian or feminist awareness in both societies.

## Chapter 4

# RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

In this chapter, Western feminist critique on Buddhism will be examined in relation to Buddhist nuns' experiences. The analysis will be based on my fieldwork findings and divided into four topics: renunciation, education, the mixed-sex sangha, and *bhikkhunī* ordination.

### Renunciation

The reason why women enter monasticism is an intriguing one. One common interpretation is that women enter nunhood as a last resort, so that a widow enters nunhood out of the social pressure for her to maintain her chastity, or a woman living in poverty enters nunhood simply for the purpose of obtaining a livelihood. For instance, Kawanami reports a well-known Burmese proverb: 'Buddhist nuns are those women whose sons are dead, who are widowed, bankrupt, in debt, and broken-hearted' (2000: 165). Such a negative image associated with Buddhist nuns exists in almost every (Buddhist) society, including Sri Lanka (Devendra 1987: 157) and Taiwan (Chen 2002: 300). Inevitably, such a negative stereotype degrades the social status of Buddhist nuns, for if Buddhist nuns are seen as being forced into nunhood by circumstance, Buddhist nuns may not be regarded as sincere and serious religious professionals with a genuine spiritual credential. Moreover, this stereotype discredits those who enter nunhood through their own conscious choice. Thus such stereotyping assumptions adversely affect the social status and in turn the welfare of the nuns, while a better understanding of Buddhist nuns' renunciation might benefit both.

It seems that male scholars in particular tend to interpret women's motivations for renunciation as non-religious. For example, Faure argues that women are unlikely to enter nunhood out of spiritual motivation: 'From the beginning, in Asia as in Europe, nunhood (even more than monkhood) was often motivated less by spiritual than social, economic, or psychological reasons, even if in the end it may have had spiritual rewards' (2003: 41). And Jiang, also a layman, argues that nunhood is a way for



single Taiwanese women to deal with their lonely life (2000: 123). The tendency for male scholars to argue for non-religious motivation of women's renunciation is not just a contemporary phenomenon. After studying late imperial Chinese literature regarding nunhood, Grant finds that male Confucian literati also had a tendency to denounce nunhood (1999: 92).

On the other hand, female researchers seem to be more willing to accept that women enter nunhood for religious reasons. For instance, Paula Arai observes that contemporary Japanese Buddhist nuns generally enter nunhood out of their own will and the fact that the nuns are more likely than monks to be celibate<sup>1</sup> testifies to the nuns' strong commitment for monasticism (1999: 122–126). Similarly, Monica Lindberg Falk observes that Thai Buddhists women generally enter nunhood as a conscious spiritual choice (2000a: 43). And Kusuma Devendra, who later became a *bhikkhuni* (Chapter 2) writes about her interviews with more than one hundred ten-precept nuns as follows:

Though some [ten-precept nuns] referred to certain traumatic experiences such as death in the family or a drinking husband, etc. as causes for their disenchantment with family life, it was often seen that their final decision to leave the household was really their inborn confidence in the [Dharma] which pointed to them a more meaningful life. Thus, recalling their past lay lives revealed no indication of nostalgia in them, neither was there any trace of regret for having abandoned the home. They never spoke disparagingly of any one as having been responsible for driving them to take robes. They mostly spoke about the emptiness of life, and the futility of facing the household battle in terms of the salient features of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*.<sup>2</sup>

(1987: 157)

Yet, it is not to say that female scholars never notice non-religious reasons for women's renunciation. For instance, Marjorie Topley notes that one major motivation for Chinese women to enter the *zhaijiao* order is to escape the rigid and patriarchal Chinese family system (1975), and Kusuma Devendra actually provides detailed descriptions of Sri Lankan ten-precept nuns' reasons for renunciation in her report (1987: 262–280). I am simply suggesting that from the literature I have gathered so far, female scholars seem to be more willing than male scholars to accept a religious/spiritual reason as the main cause or at least as one of the causes for women's renunciation.

It is possible that, as observed by Jones (1999) and Bartholomeusz (1994), women simply are more religiously inclined than men. If that were the case, female scholars may be more capable of perceiving the religious/

spiritual dimension of nunhood than male scholars. It is also possible that men perhaps unconsciously feel threatened by female ordination. Since the leaderships of all major religious institutions are currently in the hands of men (King 1989: 39), ordaining women into religious orders poses the possibility, no matter how remote, of female leadership in the future. Add to that the fact that nunhood in part represents a rejection of what men have to offer women (e.g. sex, domestic responsibilities, etc.) and female ordination thus challenges male power in both the religious realm (religious hierarchy) and secular realm (domestic life). Therefore, male scholars might be reluctant to accept that nunhood could be the first choice of women, or other than a sign that women's relationships with their family (that is, with men) had in some ways failed or broken down. Furthermore, male scholars might (unconsciously) feel threatened by the notion of women being independent decision-makers who are capable of taking control of their own life – in this case, moving towards nunhood. Accepting the possibility of nunhood being women's first choice of lifestyle means the acceptance of women having equal capacity for decision-making as men, and thus threatened the essentialist basis of male dominance (that men are more capable in decision-making than women).

Nevertheless, information provided by nearly all previous researches (e.g. Devendra 1987; Kawanami 2000) indicates that women's renunciation reasons are complicated and multifarious, and to suggest any reason as the single cause of renunciation runs the risk of simplifying the actual situation.

Before I move on to the fieldwork analysis of contemporary Sri Lankan nuns' and Taiwanese nuns' renunciation reasons, I will briefly discuss the nuns' age at renunciation.

### *Age at renunciation*

A discussion on nuns' age at renunciation was not included in the hypothesis drawn out prior to the fieldwork. It was not until my Sri Lankan fieldwork that I began to ponder the effect of nuns' age at renunciation. Throughout my Sri Lankan fieldwork, I was surprised to meet many child nuns and monks. Although child monastics exist in Taiwan as well, I have never met any in person and so they did not exist in my awareness. The encounters with child monastics in Sri Lanka not only made me aware of their existence but also led me to question the possible influence of age at renunciation on the subsequent welfare of the monastics. One of my hypotheses is that if a nun enters the order at an older age, she might be more familiar with mundane matters in the secular world and more capable of managing various affairs (e.g. financial matters) than those who are ordained at a younger age. In other words, a monastic ordained at an older age might be more capable of pursuing and/or managing his/her welfare, at least in material terms. A good example is Taiwanese *bhikkhuni*

Cheng-Yen, who helped her father to manage a cinema franchise before her renunciation. Hence, her ability to manage the vast organization, Tzu Chi, may not be seen as a surprise. The business skills that she acquired from her experience of managing the cinema franchise must have helped her in the management of Tzu Chi. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that all of my Taiwanese interviewee nuns held secular jobs prior to their ordination while it is not the case for my Sri Lankan interviewee nuns. It is thus possible that the experiences gained from their previous secular jobs provide Taiwanese nuns with better skills in the management of mundane affairs, which consequently contribute to the perceived prosperity of Buddhist nuns' orders in Taiwan.

Indeed, one Taiwanese nun noticed the influence of her age at the time of her renunciation:

I entered the monastic order at the age of thirty-three. At the age of thirty-three, all the basic ideas that I might have had already been established in the secular world. After the renunciation, it is very difficult for concepts that contradict my existing ideas to convince me. Unless there is a good reason to convince me, I would hold on to my own ideas. Thus, I have my perspective on many precepts, but I will not be astray from the basic principle.

(TN13, age 59, ordained for 26 years)

Accordingly, older age at renunciation means that one is more accustomed to the ideas and values of the secular society. A person ordained at an older age knows better how to deal with mundane affairs that may affect her/his welfare. She/he may be more likely to hold on to the values of secular society than those who are ordained at a younger age. In other words, the apparent 'prosperity' of Buddhist nuns' orders in contemporary Taiwan might be attributed to Taiwanese nuns' older age at renunciation and their ability to deal with mundane affairs associated with secular society. That is, a nun who was ordained as an adult and/or with prior secular working experience might know better how to manage mundane affairs such as donations from laity, construction projects, organizing activities for lay devotees, etc.

To prove this hypothesis, it is necessary to show that Taiwanese nuns tend to receive ordination at an older age than Sri Lankan nuns. Indeed, Tables 11 and 12 reveal that generally speaking, the Taiwanese samples were ordained at an older age than the Sri Lankan samples. Although one Taiwanese nun appears to have been ordained at a very young age, in general, Taiwanese nuns in this research sample received ordination at an older age than the Sri Lankan samples. Therefore, it might be safe to conclude that as a result of older age at renunciation, Taiwanese nuns generally are more capable than Sri Lankan nuns to deal with mundane affairs

associated with secular society. This, of course, is in addition to the effects of the general economic conditions in Sri Lanka and Taiwan (Table 1). This difference in the economic contexts suggests that it is easier for Taiwanese nuns to obtain financial resources than Sri Lankan nuns. Since 'prosperity' is usually assessed on a material basis, such as economic independence and resource allocation, Taiwanese nuns' better achievement in this regard makes Taiwanese nuns' orders appear to be more prosperous than Sri Lankan nuns' orders.

Tables 11 and 12 seem to confirm the observation that I gathered from my Sri Lankan fieldwork that it is common in Sri Lanka for children to enter the sangha. Several of my Sri Lankan interviewee nuns were ordained as children, but none of my Taiwanese interviewee nuns was ordained as a child. When I asked why they entered the order at a young age, nearly everyone answered that they had a liking for the robe since a young age and/or had a special affection for nuns, so they first moved into a nunnery

*Table 11* Age distribution of Sri Lankan nuns

<i>Years of ordination</i>	<i>Age</i>						<i>No answer</i>
	<20	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	>60	
<3	100.0	22.2	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	–
4–10	0.0	11.1	33.3	21.4	25.0	31.6	–
11–20	0.0	66.7	46.7	14.3	18.8	26.3	–
>21	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	42.1	–
No answer	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3	6.2	0.0	–
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	–
<i>Total (no.)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>19</i>	–

*Table 12* Age distribution of Taiwanese nuns

<i>Years of ordination</i>	<i>Age</i>						<i>No answer</i>
	<20	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	>60	
<3	0.0	44.0	9.6	12.7	6.8	0.0	0.0
4–10	100.0	50.0	61.6	36.7	11.4	33.3	0.0
11–20	0.0	4.9	27.8	39.2	45.4	16.7	0.0
>21	0.0	1.1	0.0	10.8	36.4	50.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
No answer	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Total (no.)</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>1</i>

and eventually received ordination. This was also a common answer from little nuns or young girls living at nunneries. For example, an 11-year-old girl I met at a Sri Lankan nunnery told me that she wished to become a nun in the future, because she 'likes the nuns and the robe'. Her family lived at a nearby village. She moved into the nunnery where one of the nuns was her aunt and had been living at the nunnery for about one and half years. Even though she lived at the nunnery, she was not entirely cut off from the secular society, for she still went to the village school for her education.<sup>3</sup> Those child nuns and girls may be young, but it seemed that they were at least aware of their affection for the robe, a certain nun or nuns and/or the monastic lifestyle. Hence, one should be careful not to see the child nuns as completely passive in their choice of entering the monastic order (e.g. ordained at the will of their parents, or not aware of the reasons for entering the monastic order). Additionally, it must be pointed out that many of my Sri Lankan informants, both lay and monastic, disapproved of children entering the sangha, mainly because they did not think that children have the capacity to make such a life-altering decision. Since child monastics are common in contemporary Sri Lanka, my informants' disapproval for child monastics reflects diversity within Sri Lankan Buddhist circles.

After I returned to Taiwan from my Sri Lankan fieldwork, I began to enquire about child monastics in Taiwan. I heard many stories, but since none of my informants was able or willing to confirm the names or details of their stories, the reliability of these stories must be questioned. It seems that as in Sri Lanka, both Taiwanese girls and boys may enter the sangha, but all boys have to disrobe on reaching the age for mandatory military service. According to my informants, it is rare for a former boy monastic to return to the robe after completing his military service. Growing up in the sangha may make survival in secular society difficult. One informant told me the story of one of her teachers at her Buddhist college. His parents sent him to the sangha while he was still young. He decided not to return to the monastic order after his military service. Yet, training in the sangha did not provide him with a marketable skill in the secular job market, and the only way he could make a living was to teach calligraphy. This story seems to confirm my hypothesis that persons ordained at a younger age tend to be less capable of dealing with mundane affairs associated with secular society. Because women in Taiwan are not obliged to do military service, child nuns tend to stay in their robes after reaching adulthood. In all the stories I heard about Taiwanese child nuns, none disrobed. Given that training in the sangha does not provide a skill for the secular job market, it is possible that some nuns might not feel confident enough to disrobe for the fear of not being able to find a living in secular society. Yet, given that I could not confirm any of the stories about Taiwanese child monastics, this hypothesis remains a speculation.

Of course, the hypothesis that a person entering the sangha at an older age is more capable of dealing with mundane affairs does not apply in every case, for it must be based on the condition that a Buddhist monastic order does not engage in secular dealings and does not offer young monastics the conditions to learn mundane affairs. While many (but not all) Buddhist nuns' orders that I encountered in Sri Lanka were adamant about meditation and seemed somehow aloof from the secular society, it is common for Taiwanese monastics to engage in secular affairs for the supposed purpose of conducting social service. Therefore, it appears that generally speaking, Taiwanese nuns have more chances to learn about dealing with mundane affairs after entering sangha than Sri Lankan nuns.

Having given this brief introduction about children monastics in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, and the age at renunciation in both countries, I will now move on to the discussion of renunciation reasons.

### *Reasons for renunciation*

From Table 13, it seems that the reasons for entering nunhood are complicated, and nuns might have more than one reason. Overall, faith in Dharma and the inclination for spiritual life account for the two most likely reasons for renunciation. Table 13 is a reminder that there might be more than one reason for a woman to enter nunhood, and the reasons might be complicated. For example, one of my Taiwanese interviewee nuns said,

Almost a year had passed since the idea of renunciation occurred to me. During that year, I kept thinking about my motivation [for renunciation] and the whole circumstance. I was twenty-eight then.

*Table 13* Responses to the question: 'Why did you become a Buddhist nun?' (multi-answers allowed)

	<i>Sri Lankan nuns</i>		<i>Taiwanese nuns</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Convinced by Dharma	25	33.8	313	63.6
Want to live a spiritual life	35	47.3	305	62.0
Old age	2	2.7	1	0.2
Not interested in secular life	—*	—	80	16.3
Other	27	36.5	115	23.4
No answer	1	1.4	6	1.2
Total	74		492	

*Note:* \*Due to a translation error, the choice 'not interested in secular life' was not included in the Sinhala questionnaires.

I even listed out all the factors and applied statistical analysis to calculate whether to stay in lay life or to enter sangha. I was a science student. I even calculated the values of possible outcomes. After much calculation . . . well, there was not much difference.

(TN14, age 40, ordained for 12 years)

There were so many factors to be considered in her renunciation decision that TN14 needed to draw out a list and apply statistical analysis to contemplate her final decision. Therefore, to simply suggest that women enter nunhood out of non-spiritual motivation or destitution or failure in secular life is to simplify the real motivation, which might be complicated and contain various subtle elements.

Based on the information gathered from the interviews, it appears that renunciation experiences differ for Sri Lankan nuns and Taiwanese nuns. As noted earlier, Sri Lankan nuns who were ordained as children generally claimed the affection for sangha and/or nun(s) since an early age as their motivation for renunciation. For example, one ten-precept nun said,

When I was very young, I used to go to temple to observe precepts. When I was 8, I met a teacher who was a Buddhist nun. But the teacher told me to wait until I was older to join the order. When I was 14, I went to live in a nunnery. I stayed there for a year as a layperson. The teacher invited a *bhikkhu* to put me in the white dress and gave preaching. When I was 15, I became a nun. Now I am 42 years old. When I was young, I used to go to temple and participate in Buddhist activities. I believe [my inclination for nunhood] is from my past life.

(SN13, in Sinhala, age 42, ordained for 27 years)

Many other Sri Lankan nuns who were ordained as children had similar stories. For whatever subtle elements there might be, they all claimed to have an inclination to leave their natal home and to live in a nunnery. One must thus be careful not to say that child nuns were pushed into nunneries by their parents, for some of the nuns recalled that their parents were unhappy about their decision for renunciation and tried to obstruct their renunciation.

The determination to remain in the sangha was also recalled by some of the nuns who were ordained as adults. One ten-precept nun said,

I became a nun at the age of 21. During my childhood, there was a nun who helped me with my study. She asked me to join the order. But I joined the order because I wanted to help people. I was the youngest one in the family and my family was upset about my decision of renunciation. They came to my temple and asked me

to return home, but I refused. My original temple is far, and this is my home village. This nunnery is actually very close to my natal home. My parents have passed away, but my siblings visit me frequently. They support my living expenses. I have A level education and have gone to college to study Buddhism.

(SN24, in Sinhala, age 37, ordained for 16 years)

Although SN24's family was not happy about her renunciation initially, they apparently had made peace with her decision and she later established a nunnery near her natal home. It is noticeable that SN24 had a relatively high level of education (A level), and materially, she was supported by her natal family. This indicates that she did not join the sangha in order to escape poverty at home, for she still needed material support from her natal family. The suggestion that women join the sangha out of destitution and for the purpose of having a better material life seemingly does not apply to her case.

Moreover, the nuns' claim that they were attracted to spiritual life (Table 13) seems to be genuine, at least as far as contemporary Sri Lankan women are concerned. This is associated with the prominence of the practice and value of meditation in Sri Lanka. After the Second World War, the practice of meditation by laity became so widespread in Sri Lanka that it probably penetrates every corner of the country (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 237–240). My observation also confirms that meditation is highly venerated in contemporary Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan informants often preached to me the reward and importance of meditation, for, they urged, meditation is the way to nirvāna. Seen from this perspective, it is then not a surprise that the desire for spiritual life should be the most likely reason given by Sri Lankan nuns as their motivation for renunciation (Table 13). Many Sri Lankans I met (of all ages, both lay and monastic) expressed their strong desire to engage in 'full-time' meditation – a desire so strong that they might be willing to forgo material comfort in order to spend more time in meditation. For example, once – by chance – I stepped into an apparently impoverished nunnery. There were nine elderly nuns living there. They greeted us kindly and I (and my translator) chatted with a 64-year-old resident nun. She said that all the nine nuns there were elderly women who wished to spend most of their time in meditation. She was married and donned the robe in spite of angry objections from her husband and children. They were so angry at her decision to renounce that they cut off all ties with her. She and the other eight nuns were only able to obtain bare necessities from the villagers. Yet, she claimed that she was happy with her decision of renunciation.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the desire for meditation was the most common reason given by my Sri Lankan interviewee nuns who were ordained at old age as the motivation for their renunciation. One elderly *bhikkhuni* eloquently explained:



So, [renunciation] is very easy for you to understand Dharma. There is time to meditate, to understand Dharma, and to walk the path to nirvāna. You live a household life and you have to attend your husband, your children, and your relations. For one hour or two hours, you can meditate in your room. You can get your mental trainings and get your mind developed. But other things are not so easy to give up. What the Buddha said? You give up attachment! Then, that is the way to attain nirvāna. But anyway, it is the Buddha's teaching. It is the Buddha's way. That is why he allowed *bhikkhuni* sangha. For all those princesses from royal family to become *bhikkhuni*. Why? Because at home, with their royal backgrounds, they can enjoy life. The Buddha's stepmother wanted to become a *bhikkhuni*. Why? Because she knew that if she stayed at the royal palace, there would be no room for her to practice Dharma. . . . It's very difficult to attain nirvāna as a layperson. Your neighbor might fall sick and they want your help. Meditation is the primary thing. But you can't meditate without [precepts]. [Precepts] are the main thing. That's the foundation. Without conducting your behaviors properly, your mind, your mouth, can't do. Without discipline, you can't do meditation.

(SN22, in English, in her 80s, ordained for 4 years)

Such was a common reason quoted by Sri Lankan nuns who were ordained at old age. They argued that there were too many distractions in lay life and, since following precepts was also important, only by entering the sangha may one attain nirvāna sooner. Since some of the nuns who were ordained at an old age had pensions or were from affluent families, economic concern (e.g. that, being in poverty, joining the sangha was the only way for them to acquire food and clothes) was unlikely to be the main cause for their renunciation. Nuns such as the 64-year-old nun described above, may even have had to give up material comfort in order to lead a monastic lifestyle. Therefore, Faure's argument that women are unlikely to enter nunhood for spiritual reason (2003: 41) does not appear to be valid in the context of contemporary Sri Lanka. As far as Sri Lankan nuns who were ordained at an old age are concerned, the desire for spiritual life appears to be their main reason for renunciation. This is consistent with Devendra's observation that because Buddhists in Sri Lanka are likely to be consistently exposed to Buddhist teachings since a young age and Sri Lankan Buddhist culture has a subtle way of encouraging people to prefer a monastic lifestyle over a householder's lifestyle, it is not uncommon for Sri Lankan Buddhists to have a strong inclination for spiritual life (1987: 279–280).

On the other hand, the renunciation experience is slightly different for contemporary Taiwanese Buddhist nuns. Meditation, though increasingly

popular in contemporary Taiwan, has not yet gained the same level of prominence in Taiwan as in Sri Lanka. This difference probably explains why the desire for a spiritual life was seldom cited by my Taiwanese interviewee nuns as their reason for renunciation, an inconsistency with the findings in Table 13. Since Buddhism is not the predominant ideology in Taiwan, nearly all my Taiwanese interviewee nuns recalled their experience of 'encountering Buddhism' and the period between their encounter with Buddhism and their renunciation is usually long. That is, being in the midst of competition between numerous ideologies, Taiwanese women need to encounter, be converted and be convinced by Buddhism before choosing Buddhist monasticism as their option of lifestyle. In other words, Taiwanese nuns chose Buddhism over a wide range of ideologies/religions, while Sri Lankan nuns chose monasticism over lay lifestyle in a broader Buddhist context. Unsurprisingly then, 'convinced by Dharma' is cited by my Taiwanese survey respondents as the most common renunciation reason (Table 13).

The finding in Table 13 is consistent with Jordan's observation on religions in postwar Taiwan. That is, increasing wealth, democratization, increasing education and increasing mobility have profoundly changed religions in Taiwan since the end of the Second World War, and Taiwanese increasingly join monasticism for religious reasons rather than for non-religious reasons (Jordan 1994). In other words, the increasing diversity in Taiwanese society and economy has provided single women in contemporary Taiwan with opportunities for finding a livelihood outside the family system and consequently numerous lifestyle options, so nunhood is no longer the only socially acceptable option for Taiwanese women without marriage. Taiwanese media even glorify women who enjoy a successful career and choose a life/motherhood without marriage (Chang 1999: 76–77). If 'not interested in secular life' might be interpreted as the lack of desire for a married life, then only 80 Taiwanese nun-respondents (16.3 percent) chose it as their reason for renunciation (Table 13). Because only a small proportion of Taiwanese nuns seemed to consider the avoidance of marriage as the cause or one of the causes for their renunciation, the suggestion that women who wish to escape the rigid and patriarchal family system may only enter nunhood can no longer apply to contemporary Taiwan. This is consistent with Li's observation that Taiwanese nuns who were ordained after the 1970s generally entered nunhood for religious reasons, for the social conditions in Taiwan no longer make nunhood the only option of lifestyle for women who detest marriage (2000a: 416). This is reflected in one Taiwanese nun's story:

I used to think: 'My next-door lady had university education and had been a teacher, but she still ended up being a housewife. It seemed that you can't escape a certain life pattern! But why must

life follow a certain pattern?' Of course, at that time it didn't occur to me that education allows you to own part of your own life and to have a different life standard. It didn't occur to me before. The next-door lady had a university education but still ended up being a housewife, so it seemed to me that even education cannot help you to escape certain life pattern. Furthermore, my parents thought that a daughter's eventual destiny is to get married and to rear children. So I thought that women's destiny cannot escape such a pattern. I may have achieved some personal advancement [in my career], but I had also seen many unfortunate examples that tell me: my life depends on the person I marry. [It's like the old saying:] 'Be a hen if you marry a cock; be a bitch if you marry a dog. Women's life is nothing more than rapeseed!'<sup>5</sup> At that time, I thought that my destiny is not under my control. So, where should I put the bid to gamble my precious life? To pursue it with my whole life? I thought about this often. And then, I encountered Buddhism. Gradually, life seemed to have a purpose. What happened was that I went to a Dharma talk and that Dharma Master talked very well. That Dharma Master answered all my questions. I thought, 'Even a teacher can't explain it so well!' . . . But I thought: 'What is nunhood actually like? Nunhood seems to be full of hardship and may not necessary be better than other choices. Perhaps there is a better life path that awaits me. Well, perhaps if I can't find a better life pattern when I reach a certain age, then I will choose a life of spiritual practice.' By coincidence, my father passed away around the same time. I would have a duty to support them as long as my parents were around. But my father passed away around that time and he left a pension for my mother. Not much, but enough for my mother. So I thought: 'It's time for me to live my own life.' I thought about how to live my life. Within a year of my father's death, I entered a Buddhist college. In that year, I didn't buy new clothes or cosmetics. I saved the money in order to pursue a Buddhist education.

(TN3, age 40, ordained for 1 year)

TN3 studied at two Buddhist colleges for seven years before she donned the robe. From her own account of her life history, she does not appear to be a passive actor who was forced into nunhood by circumstances. Rather, TN3 emerged as a rebel who refused to follow a life pattern that is governed by patriarchal values.<sup>6</sup> Although she found a married life undesirable, she did not immediately enter nunhood. She held a job, looked after her parents and searched for 'the meaning of life'. It was her desire to 'live my own life' that encouraged her to pursue a Buddhist education and eventually enter the sangha. She appeared to be the initiate of her own life

choice. TN3's story exemplifies some of my other Taiwanese interviewee nuns' answers, in the way that their loathing for a married life led them to a spiritual search, which eventually resulted in nunhood. The process of their spiritual search, encounters with Buddhism and the eventual ordination usually lasted for more than one year. Thus, their entry into the sangha did not appear to be by force but rather by their own willingness, for they took a relatively long period of time to consider their choice.

Another difference between Sri Lankan nuns and Taiwanese nuns is that some Taiwanese nuns may recall a special personal relationship with a certain *sūtra* or *bodhisattva* as their motivation for renunciation, but none of my Sri Lankan interviewee nuns did. For instance, one Taiwanese nun recalled:

[After graduating from primary school], I joined an apprenticeship for tailoring. . . . There were mostly females at my workplace. One of my coworkers liked to go to *sūtra* preaching at *bhikkhu* Jingkong's place and I went along with her. But I had no clue of what he was saying. He had a mainlanders' accent and talked very abstrusely. Whenever I recall this experience later, I would wonder where did my patience come from? Sitting there for one or two hours and understanding nothing! . . . My financial situation was pretty good then. After I became a tailor, I earned about four or five times more than a schoolteacher. But then, something happened at home. . . . After I earned lots of money for my family, I found out: 'Money does not bring happiness.' . . . I earned so much for the family and gave my mother money to dress up. And then she had a boyfriend. At that time, extra-marital affairs were not tolerated, especially for women. Of course it's sexism. Men having extra-marital affairs were tolerated, but not for women. And I was deeply affected by this social norm. I thought: 'I work so hard to improve the financial situation at home, but by the end, I harmed the family.' . . . When someone did not care about money, would she concentrate at work? So I just wandered around. Before my mother had an affair, I liked to go for *sūtra* preaching. After I deserted work, I had even more time for *sūtra* preaching. . . . Once at a temple, they preached the *Lotus Sūtra*. . . . Suddenly, tears fell down unstopably. I felt I was someone who had left the Buddha and came to wander in this dirty world. . . . So, I thought: 'How nice it is to be a monastic, so at ease, so aloof from worldly worries.' That's why I moved closer and closer toward Buddhism. Of course my family objected to my renunciation! . . . I didn't join the sangha immediately. I went to live at a temple at first. When I was 17, I went to live at a temple for two years. . . . By the end, even my Dharma Master did not want to ordain me. You see, I was only

in my late teens. If I were ordained, my parents could sue my Dharma Master.<sup>7</sup> The conditions were not ready yet. So, what should I do? I enrolled myself at a Buddhist college. I began to learn Buddhist education.

(TN7, age 38, ordained for 18 years)

TN7 claimed a special relationship with the *Lotus Sūtra*, ‘suddenly, tears fell down unstoppably’. It is common among my Taiwanese informants to claim a special relationship with a certain *sūtra* or *bodhisattva*, which brought them a profound spiritual experience that suddenly moved them and motivated them to engage in Buddhist practice even more deeply. The family problem certainly contributed to TN7’s renunciation, but as Kawanami argues, the misfortune in life might bring women to the realization of Buddhist teaching on ‘suffering’ and be a direct or indirect incentive to renunciation (2000: 163). Thus, rather than seeing the family problem as a non-religious reason that contributed to TN7’s renunciation, it might be more appropriate to see the family problem as a religious incentive, for ‘suffering’ is one of the fundamental teachings in Buddhism and the realization of suffering should be considered as a religious realization.

Overall, from the interviews I had with nuns, I had the impression that the nuns entered the sangha for genuine spiritual and/or religious reasons. Even though there is a general difference in the renunciation experiences of Sri Lankan nuns and Taiwanese nuns, the spiritual and/or religious motivation in both groups seems sincere.

### *Summary*

The fieldwork findings reveal that generalizations about nuns’ renunciation should be avoided, not only because the average age at renunciation might be different in different places or different times but also because the renunciation experience might vary widely. Overall, Sri Lankan nuns tend to be ordained at a younger age than Taiwanese nuns and are less likely to hold secular jobs prior to their ordination. This difference might contribute to the different degree of material prosperity of Buddhist nuns’ orders in contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan, for it is possible that older age at renunciation and previous secular working experience provide Taiwanese nuns with better skills in the management of mundane affairs after their renunciation. Moreover, the general economic situation is more affluent in Taiwan and the female labor force participation rate is also higher in Taiwan than in Sri Lanka (Table 1). Given the general economic context, it is likely that Taiwanese nuns have more experience in commercial dealings than Sri Lankan nuns prior to their renunciation. Another possible interpretation is that throughout history, Buddhist monasticism in China has often been criticized as socially parasitic because

of its withdrawal from economic production. As a result, Chinese Buddhism, particularly Ch'an Buddhism, developed the ethic of supporting oneself through work (Yifa 2002: 73–74). In addition, the prevailing ideology of 'Buddhism for the human realm' in contemporary Taiwan encourages Buddhists to engage in social service which might require dealings with mundane affairs and economic activities. Thus, Taiwanese nuns are more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to have the opportunities of obtaining working experiences. In other words, the seemingly prosperous Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order might be a simple consequence of the Taiwanese nuns' familiarity with mundane affairs such as financial management and commercial dealings. However, it is important to remember that to judge the prosperity of a Buddhist nuns' orders on the basis of material success contradicts the very value of Buddhist monasticism, which is supposed to renounce all worldly belongings.

The renunciation experience is also different for contemporary Sri Lankan nuns and Taiwanese nuns. With the prevalence of Buddhism and the prominence of meditation in Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Buddhists might be encouraged to engage in spiritual practice from childhood. As a result, the inclination for spiritual life appears to be strong and genuine among Sri Lankan nuns. On the other hand, the renunciation reason for Taiwanese nuns tend to relate to religious faith rather than an inclination for spiritual practices, for Taiwanese nuns choose Buddhism over other ideologies/religions. This is because the increasing diversity in Taiwanese society and the economy has provided single women socially acceptable identities other than nunhood, Taiwanese women who wish to escape the rigid and patriarchal family system, have more than nunhood to choose from. As such, a religious reason for their renunciation is likely to be genuine.

### Education

This section will discuss the hypothesis that education improves Buddhist nuns' welfare. The importance of education for women has been noticed by many (e.g. Falk 2000b; Findly 2000; Van Ede 2000; Kawanami 2000). It is important because, first of all, education gives nuns the ability to interpret scriptures and perhaps, to interpret scriptures in a way applicable to female interests. The works of *bhikkhuni* Kusuma (2000) and *bhikkhuni* Wu-Yin (2000) are good examples of this perspective. Education might also prevent nuns from being reduced to a supportive role in a religious organization (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 256) and bring higher prestige to nuns in the eyes of laity (e.g. see Kawanami 2000: 160). Hence, it is usually argued that education improves Buddhist nuns' welfare.

From Table 14, it seems that in terms of general education, contemporary Sri Lankans and Taiwanese are fairly open-minded towards female education. Although a sexist preference for sons' education might still exist

Table 14 Female education

	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Taiwan*</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>UK</i>
Girls' share of second-level enrolment (%)	51	49	49	52
Third-level students per 1,000 population (1992–1997)				
Women	3.9	55.8	58.4	31.0
Men	5.6	52.5	48.2	31.7
Women's Share of third-level enrolment (%) (1992–1997)	44	50	56	51

Source: *The World's Women 2000: trends and statistics*. United Nations Statistics Division. <http://www.un.org/depts/unsd/ww2000/tables.htm>, accessed April 2004

\* Source of Taiwan statistics: *Guoqing Tongji Tongbao* (Jan. 2003), <http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/dgbas03/bs2/Gender/n9108.htm>, accessed April 2004.

(for Sri Lanka, see Jayaweera 1984 and 1991; for Taiwan, see Hsieh 1995), female education is at least not frowned upon in either country. In both contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan, 44–50 percent of students at the third level of education are female (Table 14). Thus, it is safe to say that in contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan, nearly all girls have access to basic secular education. This section will focus on their access to Buddhist education and its influence on the nuns, which may not be entirely the same as secular education.

### *Background*

It is difficult to make a clear-cut comparison between Buddhist education in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, for while Buddhist study has a prominent position in the educational structure in Sri Lanka, religious study of any kind is marginalized in Taiwan. Historical and political factors contribute to this difference.

In Sri Lanka, colonial experience alerted Buddhists to the importance of Buddhist education, for the British used education as a means of diffusing Christianity and colonizing Sri Lankans culturally. The pre-colonial form of Sinhala Buddhism was undermined and damaged during colonial rule (Malalgoda 1976: 191–231). Additionally, although in pre-colonial Sri Lanka the sangha was the main agent responsible for the education of monastics as well as laity (Rahula, 1956: 287–302), this role was damaged during the colonial period, during which preference for English-language and state and missionary schools by the colonial administration deeply diminished the importance of the educational role of the sangha (Bond 1988: 16–22). Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, during the Sinhala Buddhist revival movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Buddhist education was promoted. Anagārika Dharmapāla, probably the most



influential lay leader in the Sinhala Buddhist revival movement, eagerly advocated Buddhist education for the Sinhala people. Buddhist education was seen as the means to preserve the Sinhala/Buddhist heritage and to counter the influence of Christian missionary schools (Bond 1988: 53–61; Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 207–212). After Independence in 1948, various measures were implemented to improve the situation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. For example, the 1972 Constitution gave Buddhism ‘the foremost place’ in the protection from the State while assuring freedom for all other religions (Dewaraja 1998: 116). In terms of education, the study of religions was made compulsory and Buddhism became a subject of study at state schools. Buddhist Sunday schools, with financial assistance from the state, were set up to provide additional Buddhist education for children. A special university called the ‘Buddhist and Pāli University’ was established in the 1980s. As a result of these efforts, Sri Lanka became one of the leading countries in Buddhist studies (Gunasekera 1998). This culture of Buddhist education also reflects in the aspiration of the nuns in the way that they are eager to spread Buddhism. The majority of Buddhist nunneries that I visited in Sri Lanka held a Sunday school for children, and only nunneries run by elderly nuns tended not to have Sunday schools for children. This shows the extensiveness of Buddhist education in Sri Lanka and nuns’ involvement in providing it. However, it is also important to note that Sri Lankan Buddhist education aims at disseminating Buddhist belief rather than approaching the study of Buddhism as a secular academic subject. This is probably in part under the influence of the pre-Independence Buddhist revival movement, which was preoccupied with countering the influence of education under Christian missionaries (see Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988: 207–212).

In addition to Buddhist education for laity, the Sri Lankan government also supports Buddhist monastic education. Special educational institutions for Buddhist monks (and later, the ten-precept nuns), called *pirivena*, were established. As shown in Table 15, *pirivena* appear to be educating a fairly large number of students. The lower level of *pirivena* may take five years to complete. It offers nine subjects: Pāli, Sanskrit, Buddhism, Social Studies, Sinhala, Health, History, Mathematics and Buddhist scriptures (*Tripitaka*). The higher level of *pirivena* may take three years to complete, and upon completion, students may take the examination in ‘Buddhism and Oriental Languages’ (*prachina*). These *pirivena* receive an annual state grant on the basis of their status and their number of pupils. However, De Silva and Bartholomeusz suggest that education at *pirivena* could be blamed for the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, because the curriculum at *pirivena* is largely irrelevant to the issues of contemporary society and provides the students, who are religious professionals and may hold great influence in society in the future, little knowledge about laity and ethnic minorities (2001: 20–23). While I have been unable to examine the link between a



Table 15 Distribution of schools and pupils in Sri Lanka

<i>Number of schools</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
Government schools	9,976	9,829	9,790
Private schools	78	80	85
Pirivenas	561	599	600
<i>Number of pupils</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>
Government schools	4,193,908	4,027,075	3,941,685
Private schools	95,385	97,174	99,476
Pirivenas	51,156	54,968	55,725

Source: *Sri Lanka Statistical Data Sheet: 2004*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/misc/ds2004.pdf>, accessed 4 June 2005.

curriculum not designed with contemporary issues in mind and ethnic conflict, as proposed by De Silva and Bartholomeusz, if they were right, it is certainly a tragic side-effect of *pirivena*.

*Pirivena* might have a long presence in Sri Lanka, but its admission for women came relatively late. Bartholomeusz notices that although Buddhist education for women was promoted during the Sinhala Buddhist revival movement prior to Independence, it declined rapidly after Independence, as the political attention shifted to the Sinhala–Tamil issue (1994: 130–152). This might account for the finding that the ten-precept nuns were economically deprived and poorly educated in research carried out during the 1980s by both Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra (1987). In fact, it was not until 1995 that the government lifted the ban on the ten-precept nuns' admission to *pirivena* (Goonatilake 2001: 3). To the best of my knowledge, however, *bhikkhuni* were still banned from studying at *pirivena* at the time of my fieldwork in 2002. Nevertheless, during my fieldwork in Sri Lanka in 2002, I found that the situation for Buddhist nuns' education has somewhat improved, for I encountered many highly educated Buddhist nuns, including many who held postgraduate degrees. The case studies in Chapter 2 are examples that show that, regardless of whether they have governmental sponsorship and recognition or not, Buddhist nuns are not to be easily stopped from pursuing education. They try to establish schools and to provide education for nuns in spite of various difficulties. Some, such as the Sakyadhita Center near Colombo, are able to obtain foreign donations and thus to provide Buddhist nuns with comfortable educational facilities. Others, such as Dambulla Bhikkhuni Training Center, may have impoverished facilities but are still able to attract many Buddhist nuns who are eager for further education in Buddhism. Apparently, Buddhist nuns themselves realize the importance of adequate and advanced Buddhist education, and they are hungry for it. Their attitude towards education will be further discussed in the next section.

Many scholars argue that in post-Independence Sri Lanka, Buddhism has merged with Sinhala nationalism (e.g. De Silva and Bartholomeusz 2001; Tambiah 1992). Perhaps because of this, my Sri Lankan informants overwhelmingly seemed to consider governmental sponsorship and recognition of Buddhist activities, status, etc. essential. For example, a Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* proudly showed me her ID card, on which her status as *bhikkhunī* was stated. She appeared to consider having the *bhikkhunī* status recognized by the government a significant step towards the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka.<sup>8</sup> That the government is seen by many Sinhala Buddhists as having a responsibility to protect Buddhism was also reflected in a complaint from a Sri Lankan ten-precept nun:

Some nuns in Sri Lanka face lots of difficulties. Some of them do not have education, nor help from the community. There are nuns living in difficult situations in rural areas. If one does not have education, it is not suitable for her to become a nun. Or one should get education after becoming a nun. The government does not give much help to nuns, neither *bhikkhunī* nor ten-precept nuns. Even though ten-precept nuns are recognized by the government, the government helps only the monks. I wish the government could help ten-precept nuns and *bhikkhunī* more, but asking the government for help is useless.

(SN16, in Sinhala, age 51, ordained for 19 years)

It appears that SN16 valued education for Buddhist nuns, and yet, she observed that governmental assistance tended to be given to monks while nuns had to struggle for their education. Her complaint about the governmental neglect of nuns' education reflects an attitude that attributes the responsibility of providing Buddhist education to the government. Such an attitude was common among my Sri Lankan informants. This attitude is, of course, also the result of the precedence set by governmental support for male monastic education.

Such a 'privileged' status is inconceivable for Taiwanese Buddhists. To begin with, the Taiwanese government does not even recognize the status of religious clergy. According to my Taiwanese informants, Buddhist monks and nuns have their official documents written in their lay names and their clergy status unmentioned. Furthermore, unlike in Sri Lanka, where religious education is prominent and in some cases, sponsored by the government, religious education in Taiwan is greatly marginalized. Religious study in the state-recognized educational system was banned until 1991 (Heng-Ching Shih 1999: 425). Although several universities in Taiwan now have religious studies departments, religious-study institutes such as Christian seminaries or Buddhist colleges remain unrecognized by the government, and religious study remains untaught at state schools.

Around the year 2000, there was talk of the Ministry of Education recognizing religious-study institutes<sup>9</sup> but, at the time of writing, the talk remains just talk. Religious-study institutes in Taiwan have not yet gained state recognition.

Rather than seeing the marginalization of religious education in Taiwan as the idea – imported from the West – of separating the church and the state, it is in fact a continuation of the centuries-old treatment of religion by the Chinese state. Historically, the Chinese state has frequently and purposely marginalized institutional religion (religions that have an independent theology, rituals and organization), while at the same time, religious values (Confucian ethics, ancestral worship, the theology of yin and yang, etc.) that are not associated with any particular religious institution, are diffused into nearly all aspects of social life, and in some cases, promoted by the state (Yang 1961: 294–303). This attitude is reflected in school textbooks of contemporary Taiwan, in the way that institutional religions such as Buddhism and Christianity are rarely mentioned, but various religious values such as ancestral worship and Confucian morality are frequently praised (Meyer 1987). This might be an attempt to maintain social stability and the power of the central government, for the various religious values place the emperor/national leader at the top of its belief hierarchy and subsequently diminish the influence of priests of institutional religions. Hence, rather than emphasizing the values of a particular institutional religion, throughout the years, it is an idealized Confucian culture from mainland China that has been propagated in contemporary Taiwan (Reed 1994). In other words, whereas Buddhism is highly valued in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankans can take pride in their country for being ‘the beacon of the Theravāda Buddhist world’ (Dewaraja 1998: 117), Taiwan is by and large a Confucian (and increasingly, capitalist) society, and Buddhism (or any institutional religion) is marginalized.

The state indifference towards religious study has not deterred Taiwanese Buddhists from pursuing religious education. According to the Digital Museum of Buddhism in Taiwan,<sup>10</sup> there are currently twenty-six Buddhist colleges in Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> The tuition at these Buddhist colleges is free. In addition, many Buddhist colleges provide free lodgings (residence at the campus is required by most colleges), and some colleges even offer scholarships to students. Generally, Buddhist colleges in Taiwan are not merely open to monastics of the founding sangha of the college: monastics from other sangha, as well as laity, may also attend. The twenty-six Buddhist colleges are either for both sexes or for female-only<sup>12</sup>, except for one, Fuyan Buddhist Institute,<sup>13</sup> which changed from a college for both sexes to male-only in 1993. This change was out of the concern for the decline of the monks’ order in Taiwan, such that the college wished to promote advanced Buddhist study among monks by providing an encouraging academic environment for them.<sup>14</sup> According to some informants, in a mixed-sex

class, monks usually do not perform as well as nuns and thus are often discouraged from pursuing further Buddhist education, so Fuyan Buddhist Institute changed to a male-only college for the purpose of promoting Buddhist study among monks.

Although Taiwanese Buddhists manage to establish Buddhist education in spite of the lack of governmental support or recognition, the governmental neglect does have a negative impact on Taiwanese Buddhist education. Ding summarizes seven common problems faced by Buddhist colleges in Taiwan, as follows:

- 1 Students of different secular educational background may be allocated to the same class;
- 2 There is generally a shortage of qualified teachers;
- 3 There is a lack of a well-designed, well-established monastic training system;
- 4 Curricula and teaching method at many Buddhist colleges are often irrelevant to contemporary issues and lack contemporary training style;
- 5 [Due to the uncertainty of financial resources] the continuity of many colleges is uncertain;
- 6 Graduated monastic students may find returning to ordinary sangha lifestyle difficult to adjust to;
- 7 Graduates from Buddhist colleges often have difficulties finding a job.

(1996: 41)

Because each Buddhist college has to finance itself, the lack of funding may cause it to close down.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, because the government does not regulate the quality of teachers or provide a standardized system of Buddhist education, each college differs in its curricula and standard.<sup>16</sup> The Taiwanese government's lack of recognition for institutes of religious study means that the qualifications of graduates of such institutes may be unrecognized, and they consequently have difficulties finding employment. For instance, in Sri Lanka, I met some nuns who held teaching jobs (in the subject of Buddhism) at state schools. In Taiwan, however, a teaching job at state school is out of bounds to a graduate of a Buddhist college since her/his degree is not recognized by the Ministry of Education. I personally know several Taiwanese graduates from Buddhist colleges who went on to study abroad. One of the reasons for their studying abroad is the need for them to obtain a degree that is recognized by Taiwan's Ministry of Education in order to be able to return to Taiwan qualified enough to apply for teaching positions.

While the overall position of Buddhist education in Taiwan may be relatively marginalized, if we turn to the issue of gender relations, there seems

to be no discrimination against the education of nuns. According to many informants, Buddhist education for nuns is relatively accessible. Two factors might account for this fact. The first is a historical factor – Buddhist education was used as a means of cultural colonization. Buddhist education was first used by the Japanese colonialists as a means to ‘Japanize’ the Taiwanese population. Later, Buddhist education was once again used by the mainlander monks and nuns as the means to establish Orthodox Chinese Buddhism on the island (Chapter 2). The second factor is the persistently large number of Buddhist female renunciants in Taiwan, which may have forced Buddhist educators to acknowledge Buddhist women’s desire for religious education. As a result, Taiwanese Buddhist women have enjoyed a fairly easy access to religious education.

Economic factors also contribute to the easy accessibility of religious education for Taiwanese women. Despite the lack of governmental sponsorship, other conditions have provided Taiwanese Buddhists with ways to finance their religious education. It has already been noted that Taiwanese nuns’ older age at ordination, working experience prior to renunciation, the ethics of supporting oneself through work, and familiarity with mundane affairs might have contributed to the prosperity (at least in terms of material well-being) of Taiwanese nuns’ orders. Although Buddhist precepts forbid Buddhist monastics from engaging in commercial dealings, owning property and money-handling (Wijayaratna 2001: 85–113; 1990: 76–83), Buddhist monastics in Taiwan have always been allowed to finance themselves. One Taiwanese nun told me:

Our source of income? I think that there are different phases. . . . In early times, we were like the rest of the society. Initially, we made our living by farming. We are descendants of Ch’an school. Even though we don’t know about Ch’an and we don’t know about Ch’an meditation, we are still descendants of the Linji lineage. Ch’an Master Baizhang said, ‘One day without work, one day without food’. Life in the ancient sangha was like that. Of course, the whole of Taiwanese society was like that, too. Hence, in rural areas like ours, our livelihood came from farming. Buddhism was not yet well established, and people in rural areas did not know to come to Buddhist temples to give offerings, or to offer things for the temple functions, so we had to be self-reliant. So initially, our main source of income was farming. But society keeps changing. Farming in Taiwan can no longer provide a substantial income. As a result, the economic resources for Buddhism must also change in order to adjust to social changes. I am talking about our own sangha only. Sangha in urban areas certainly have a different story. We have to change. Now we obtain our income from performing rituals, and we also perform services for laity. For

example, if someone dies, we will go to their home to chant sutra for them. And then, they will give us offerings.

(TN11, in her 50s, ordained for more than 30 years)

TN11's statement reveals that unlike in Sri Lanka, where going on alms-rounds is still a common practice, Taiwanese monastics have had to finance themselves since early days. This is due partly to necessity ('... people in rural areas did not know to come to Buddhist temples to give offerings') and partly to the Ch'an ethic of supporting oneself through work ('one day without work, one day without food'). It was not until the economy in Taiwan became affluent that TN11's sangha was able to sustain itself through performing rituals.

The farming practice is also interesting. Taiwanese *bhikkhunī* Yifa points out that:

Although farming is technically a violation of the precepts, a number of accounts in the Vinayas indicate that the monks of the time cultivated fruits and vegetables. The [*Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*] records an instance in which a group of monks who had planted vegetables later became unsure of the correctness of their actions and, not daring to eat them, went first to the Buddha to seek advice. The Buddha told them that since the vegetables had grown by themselves, the monks were allowed to eat them. . . . To avoid being called social parasites (mostly by Confucians), Chinese Buddhist monks began farming as a means of self-support. As is evident in the biographies of eminent monks, farming was never thought to detract in any way from a monk's honor.

(2002: 73)

This suggests a negotiation between observing Buddhist monastic precepts and the social norms in the wider society. In spite of the prohibition of farming for Buddhist monastics and ideals of supporting oneself through alms-rounds, in order to survive in Confucian society, Chinese Buddhist monastics normalized farming and developed a working ethics that might be unthinkable to Theravāda monastics. As indicated in TN11's statement above, this working ethic becomes an influential economic factor for contemporary Taiwanese nuns to finance themselves.

In my observation and the survey findings (Tables 20 and 21, below) lay donation and performing rituals are cited by nuns in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan as the most common source of livelihood. However, there are differences. One major difference is in the type of offerings. In Sri Lanka, offerings are usually in kind, such as clothes, sugar and food. Only on occasions when there is a specific project (e.g. the construction of a new building, social function) going on in the monastery, might money be

offered in cash. On the other hand, in Taiwan, offerings to Buddhist monastics are usually money in cash, which is put into a red envelope<sup>17</sup> and then offered to monks and nuns.

The following teachings by Taiwanese *bhikkhuni* Wu-Yin might offer a glance into the general attitude of Taiwanese Buddhists in regard to monetary dealings:

How, then do we handle monastics' individual needs that require money? In community life, the individual has no personal property aside from her thirteen garments. Although individual monastics are not allowed to possess money, the monastic community is permitted to have monetary resources. If the money is first offered to the assembly, the assembly can later assign it to an individual to use for her personal needs. Thus we say the community should not be as poor as the individual. The community has to have enough resources to protect, help, and take care of the individual members of the [sangha]. . . . If we do business for our own personal gain, greed and miserliness easily arise. We begin to think of how to get the best deal for ourselves, and this could lead us to cheat and lie. Such attitudes and actions clearly obstruct our spiritual progress. In addition, the laypeople will cease to respect the [sangha].

(2001: 235–236)

She goes on to say:

Given the structure of our modern society and the fact that people donate money for the use of individuals, monastics' handling of money seems almost inevitable nowadays. We need to respect the donor's intention, although we can advise them to support the [sangha] instead of the individual, as the Buddha did when donors wanted to make individual offerings to him. According to monastic precepts, a lay Buddhist should handle the personal donations for monastics. Unfortunately, in modern times we may not be able to find a capable, supportive, and trustworthy lay person for that job. Thus, one nun or a group of nuns may be assigned to do it. This person is free from wrongdoing because she is taking care of money for the [sangha]; she is not handling her private funds.

(2001: 238)

Accordingly, it seems that Taiwanese Buddhism tolerates various kinds of economic activities by monastics, as long as the purpose is pure and is for the well-being of the community. In fact, from approximately the eighth century onward, money handling, commercial dealing and property



ownership became acceptable for Chinese Buddhist monastics. Various factors (e.g. the rise of the Neo-Confucian movement which criticized the Buddhist monastic custom of begging/alms-rounds) caused this change (Gernet 1995: 153–191). *Bhikkhuni* Wu-Yin's two statements above indicate a practical attitude towards monastic precepts. It is consistent with Buswell's observation that East Asian Buddhists tend to observe precepts on the basis of practical concerns (2002: 80–81). This is also reflected in the study of the Eight Special Rules. In Sri Lanka it tends to be based on a theoretical level while in Taiwan it tends to be based on practical concerns.

Noting the working ethic in Buddhism in Taiwan is not to imply that land-ownership or other kinds of economic activities (e.g. employing lay laborers, or a complicated structure for managing sangha finance) have never been accepted in Sri Lanka. Indeed, Sinhala chronicles reveal that a sangha might be a rich landowner and employer of a large number of lay laborers (see Rahula 1956: 135–152). Yet, my Sri Lankan informants generally stressed that Sri Lankan monastics to this day honor the precepts of not touching money, and obtain their food from going on alms-rounds. Both practices are rare in contemporary Taiwan. Since various kinds of economic activities are allowed for Buddhist monastics in Taiwan, financing religious education does not have to rely solely on the external sources (that is, governmental grants).

However, the needs of contemporary society might compel Sri Lankan nuns to change their practice. For instance, one of my Sri Lankan interviewee *bhikkhuni* (SN5<sup>18</sup>) touched money purposely in front of me and exclaimed, 'Look! I am touching money'. She went on to tell me that for the purpose of doing social service, the prohibition on touching money had to be waived. Moreover, once in a Sri Lankan nunnery where I spent a night, a representative of a busload of pilgrims traveling to a nearby sacred site came in and asked the nuns for lodging at the temple. My hostess nuns agreed. The head nun later told me that it was a common practice in Sri Lanka for Buddhist temples to accept lodging requests from travelers. In return, the travelers would offer some money to the temple.<sup>19</sup> Apparently, providing lodging is also a way for Sri Lankan Buddhist monastics to generate income.<sup>20</sup> It shows that the source of income for Sri Lankan Buddhist monastics is not limited to offerings in material goods. Regretfully, I must also point out that Buddhist pilgrims from other countries, in this time of globalized Buddhism and affordable international travel, may be unintentionally changing Buddhist practices in Sri Lanka. The first time I went to Sri Lanka, I went as a pilgrim along with other Taiwanese Buddhists. Ignorant of the custom in Sri Lanka and of Buddhist monastic precepts, we gave cash-offerings to monks, as we do in Taiwan. Only years later, I learnt that one is not supposed to give cash-offerings to Buddhist monastics in Sri Lanka. The emphasis on abstaining from money handling for Theravāda monastics is noted by Wijayaratna. After pointing out that



historically, different schools have different attitudes towards money handling, he goes on to say:

In the Theravādin view, monks and nuns did not have the right to buy anything; they were to rely entirely on lay people for the material aspect of their lives: as long as there were lay followers, monks and nuns did not need money.

(Wijayaratna 1990: 88)

However, it is quite common for monks in Sri Lanka to handle money, although some *nikaya* are stricter than others. Many Sri Lankan monks accept the inevitability of handling money under contemporary social circumstances, but different *nikaya* might deal with this issue differently (e.g. using coupons instead of cash).<sup>21</sup> It is possible that my Sri Lankan nun informants were more conscious of monastic rules than the average monks, because as argued above, nuns were more likely to have a spiritual motivation for monasticism in the first place, so they were more likely to be inclined to move away rather than into economic involvement.

#### *Nuns' attitudes towards education*

Overall, I found that Buddhist nuns in both contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan held a positive and aspirational attitude towards education. Many of them commented on the importance of education for nuns. One Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* who ran an educational center for young nuns said:

I teach, and school teachers come [here to teach as well]. [Our syllabuses include:] Dharma, Pāli, Sanskrit, Math, History, [Sinhala], Tamil, and Social Science. So it's a school for young nuns. Sometimes after graduation, they go to university. But my main idea is that they should teach Dharma because nuns aren't similar to laypeople. . . . Therefore, I would like to give them Dharma education. I started the center two years ago because I wanted to give Dharma lessons according to the person's condition and education. According to Buddhist doctrine, as a nun, she should know Dharma first, then maybe learning [other things] according to the doctrine. They should complete this first. But in addition to that, language is very important. Language is very important because [Sinhala] is used only in Sri Lanka. But Sri Lanka is not enough for [Sinhala]. English is also very important. . . . [For the graduated students], my main wish is [that they will] give service to the society, social service, good social service, social service according to Dharma. Social service is very important because the Buddha also gave social service. That's why I want *bhikkhunī* or *sāmanerī* to

do social service according to Dharma. . . . Education is important for the nuns. If no education, then how [do we] work? Because people invite us to give Dharma doctrine, they give us alms, and then we should give them doctrine. Then some people come to us for their problems, mostly young girls. Young girls come to our nunnery because of their problems. To solve them, we should get good education to help, so we can solve their problems according to Dharma. So education is very important. Without education, we cannot do anything!

(SN8, in English, 58 years old, ordained for 48 years)

The statement of SN8 shows that, far from being a passive woman, she was an active initiator in the pursuit of Buddhist nuns' welfare (at least in terms of education), for she sought to provide educational opportunities for nuns. It is also important to note that she considered Dharma as the essential basis for all types of education. Seemingly for her, every thought or action should be in accordance with Dharma. Her insistence on Dharma in education (possibly referring to a Buddhist study of Buddhist sūtra) might seem inconceivable for people educated in secular settings, but it might be common that an insider (the nun) holds a different perspective from an outsider (the researcher). I learnt this lesson from my fieldwork. For instance, when I asked the nuns, 'Is there anything you wish to improve in your life?' at the end of each interview, I had worldly concerns in mind (i.e. material comfort, gender relations, etc.). But the nuns usually gave me an answer related to their spiritual progress (e.g. SN8's answer: 'I want to improve my mind. I want to get rid of every bad idea, jealousy, mostly anger'). Such is a reminder of the insider/outsider issue. The fact that I am judging Buddhist nuns' welfare on the basis of worldly concerns may not truly reflect the interests of nuns.

The insistence on Dharma for nuns' education is not found among Sri Lankan nuns alone. A Taiwanese nun mentioned her experience in the pursuit of higher education as follows:

All of my undergraduate Buddhist education was done in Taiwan. I wanted to go to Japan to study Social Welfare. But the Principal told me: 'You shouldn't study Social Welfare. You should study Buddhism. You are a monastic.' Therefore, I did my MA in Buddhism. The elder has her own idea. She said, 'Let laity study Social Welfare. They can do social service or social works after returning. You should focus on your own profession [as a religious professional].'

(TN15, age 47, ordained for 23 years)

Apparently, many Buddhist nuns in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan consider the study of Dharma the essential basis for all education, so much so

that the Principal of TN15's Buddhist college insisted that her pupils pursue Buddhist study rather than secular study.

Another thing manifested in TN15's statement is the issue of the generation gap. While she intended to study Social Welfare, the Principal of her Buddhist college thought that a religious professional's duty was within the religious realm only and discouraged her from studying a secular subject. I noticed the problem of the generation gap in Sri Lanka, too. A young ten-precept nun told me about her frustration in pursuing higher education:

Devotees know that I am studying higher education, so when they come for rituals, they offer me money. I am studying at a government university for an external degree. I am an external student. My teacher doesn't like me to study for higher education because she doesn't think higher education is good for the ten-precept nuns. That's why I entered the university as an external student. Most of the ten-precept nun teachers don't have much education, so they don't realize the value of education. If I have the opportunity, I would like to pursue higher education. But my teacher doesn't like that.

(SN14, in Sinhala, age 23, ordained for 10 years)

SN14 interpreted her teacher's reservations towards her pursuit of higher education as a result of her ignorance about the value of education. However, as I later had the chance to chat with her teacher, who spoke English, and other elderly ten-precept nuns throughout the fieldwork, it became apparent to me that the elderly ten-precept nuns' resistance towards education (and the *bhikkhunī* ordination) was out of a more realistic concern for their basic well-being rather than being ignorant. Many elderly ten-precept nuns I met resisted the idea of sending their young disciples for the *bhikkhunī* ordination or higher education, not because they resented the very idea of the *bhikkhunī* ordination or nuns' education, but because they worried that once their young disciples became more socially advanced (either by the *bhikkhunī* ordination or by higher education) than the teachers, the young disciples might come to despise the less-educated ten-precept nun teachers. In general, elderly ten-precept nuns seemed to worry that their socially advanced disciples might leave them in financial despair and/or physical neglect. One elderly ten-precept nun said to me:

Some *bhikkhunī* are our pupils. But they don't obey us. When we advise them, they went away and became *bhikkhunī*. Foreigners help them. . . . They became *bhikkhunī* without teachers! As a Buddhist, how can you become a *bhikkhunī* without a teacher?<sup>22</sup>

The statement above shows the concerns of an elderly woman over her basic well-being in old age. Hence, rather than seeing the elderly nuns' resentment towards education and the *bhikkhunī* ordination as being conservative or ignorant, it might be more appropriate to see the resentment as the concern over their basic well-being in old age (financial situation, the need for physical care, etc.). This problem occurred in Taiwan, too. During the transition period of *zhaijiao* to Orthodox Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan, there were stories of young *zhaijiao* disciples, after receiving the *bhikkhunī* ordination, becoming disrespectful toward their teachers who were still *zhaijiao* women (Jiang 2000: 239). In other words, although the higher ordination might seem like a positive feminist effort, for it gives the nuns the same monastic status as monks, without being mindful to the whole situation, the higher ordination might in reality become oppressive towards some other nuns. Another concern expressed in the elderly nun's statement is about the need for the young nuns to have a teacher to guide them in the spiritual path. The elderly nun might be worried that the young nuns' preoccupation with the higher education and the *bhikkhunī* ordination may not be fruitful to their spiritual progress.

It is important to note the mention of 'foreigners help them' by the elderly ten-precept nun. The promotion and/or financial assistance from overseas in regard to the *bhikkhunī* ordination and nuns' education might seem like a positive feminist effort in improving nuns' welfare. Yet, as exemplified in the statement above, such a seemingly feminist effort, if done without a wholesome consideration, might in effect become oppression upon some nuns and break the tradition of the ten-precept nunhood. In fact, this is not the only realm in which well-intended foreign sponsors cause problems in traditional established hierarchies and welfare. Japanese sponsorship, for example, has in some cases interfered with temple inheritance.<sup>23</sup> There are interesting accounts in Abeysekara of how financial donations from East Asia interfere with Buddhist monastic practices in Sri Lanka (2002: 109–142). Some of my Sri Lankan nun informants also complained about Korean interference in their sangha activities, and I too encountered some Sri Lankan laywomen who, being influenced by Taiwanese Buddhists, worshipped Guanyin. Apparently, Sri Lankan Buddhism has in recent years been influenced by East Asian Buddhists. Since I know of Theravāda (and Tibetan) Buddhist missionaries in Taiwan and many Taiwanese women who were ordained in Theravāda (and Tibetan) tradition, the exchanges among different Buddhist traditions might be a natural result of the increasing international travel rather than an intended inference on Sri Lankan tradition. However, being ignorant or unmindful of the tradition in Sri Lanka, financial sponsorship from East Asian Buddhists might unwisely interfere and cause problems to the traditional established Buddhist hierarchies and welfare in Sri Lanka.

Ironically, patriarchal preference for monks might become a hindrance to male advancement in religious education. A Taiwanese nun observed:

Monks don't study. [A monk] doesn't even want to study. Nowadays, if a teacher were good, he/she would send the disciples for further education. If a disciple wants to study, the teacher would certainly want the disciple to develop. The problem is that monks don't even want to study. Why? Be practical! As soon as [a monk] goes out, he becomes a 'great Dharma Master'. People would give him offerings, and there would be a large group of female disciples following him. He can have whatever he wants. Why should he study then? Studying is such a hardship. You may not achieve anything in ten or twenty years. So, you see, it's the reality. All those who study are nuns. So, how can a teacher have male or female preference in terms of education?

(TN13, age 59, ordained for 26 years)

Other Taiwanese nuns complained about laity's preference for monks, too. It seems that many Taiwanese laypeople prefer to support monks rather than nuns. However, since it is easier for monks to find lay support and gain social status, monks may thus become less interested in pursuing education. As TN13's statement above shows, the laity's preference for monks may only become a hindrance that does not encourage monks to pursue further education.

This section has given a brief introduction to nuns' attitudes towards education. It seems that nuns in both contemporary Sri Lanka and Taiwan value education, especially Dharma education. The next section aims to gain more understanding about the influence of religious education on the nuns.

### *Survey analysis*

As noted above, the attitude towards religious education in the wider society is different in Sri Lanka and Taiwan. While in Sri Lanka, religious education is taught at almost every level of educational institutions, religious education is neglected in Taiwan. Furthermore, the different attitudes toward Buddhist monastics' economic activities and the difference in the general economic contexts have induced different outcomes for Buddhist education for nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan. That is, although Buddhist education is esteemed and promoted in Sri Lanka, the lack of financial resources has made the pursuit of education difficult for many nuns. Although religious education of any kind is marginalized in Taiwan, the affluent general economic condition and the ethic of supporting oneself through work have provided the nuns with adequate financial resources for their education.

Because of the various differences in the educational situation for Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, it seems difficult to conduct a comparative study about the influence of Buddhist education on the basis of questionnaires. For while the distinction between secular education and formal Buddhist education is clear in Taiwan, it is not as clear in Sri Lanka where one may obtain Buddhist education at state schools. This problem shows up in the Sri Lankan questionnaire responses in the way that there appeared to be confusion over the definition of secular education and formal Buddhist education. For example, two Sri Lankan nuns answered the questions regarding their secular educational level and formal Buddhist educational level simply as, 'Dharma school'. It might mean that they were educated in a nunnery or at a Buddhist school. Some of the nuns specified the Buddhism-related GCE O-level or A-level credits they studied, but some of the nuns simply put down a number as the years of their formal Buddhist education. The number of years might correspond to their secular education since Buddhism is a subject of study in the Sri Lankan educational system, but it may also refer to the years of study that they received at a specific monastic training institute. Some of the nuns specified that they passed the Buddhism and Oriental Languages exam (*pracheena*) without mentioning the formal Buddhist education they received. It might mean that they studied the exam by themselves or were tutored in an informal setting. When some of the nuns replied 'BA' or 'MA' as their secular education level, they also specified that their degrees were in the subject of Buddhism. Since there is a crossover between secular education and formal Buddhist education in Sri Lanka and some of my Sri Lankan questionnaire respondents appear to be confused about the definitions of secular education and formal Buddhist education, I decided to do the Sri Lankan survey analysis on the basis of their secular education level rather than their formal Buddhist education level. As Buddhist education penetrates almost every level of educational institutions in Sri Lanka, the respondents' secular education level may still reflect the level of Buddhist education that they received.

The survey cannot fully reflect the influence of Buddhist education on Taiwanese nuns, either. First, since Taiwan has no regulations regarding the system or curriculum of Buddhist education, even though the titles of educational levels (undergraduate, postgraduate) at different Buddhist colleges might be the same, the content and standard of training may vary widely at different colleges. Secondly, as a Taiwanese nun replied in the question regarding her formal Buddhist education: 'The sangha I am living in now is itself a Buddhist college, not the type of college in the secular sense' (age 31–40, ordained for 4–10 years), the survey cannot reflect the Buddhist education that one may receive through informal channels (e.g. internal training at each sangha, self-taught, radio preaching, etc.). Nevertheless, because asking about one's 'formal Buddhist education' is the only

tangible way of measuring a nun's Buddhist education, I can only depend on the result of this question to analyze the influence of Buddhist education.

The educational level among the survey respondents seems to be fairly high. Among the seventy-four Sri Lankan respondents, 38.2 percent have GCE O-level education or above. Among the 492 Taiwanese respondents, 42.3 percent have undergraduate Buddhist education or above, and 196 out of the 492 Taiwanese respondents (39.8 percent) have third level secular education or above. It is, however, hard to compare these figures with society as a whole. Although all three figures are lower than the ratio of female students at the second or third level of education in Sri Lanka and Taiwan (Table 14), one must remember that the figures in Table 14 reveal only the ratio of female students' enrollment during the period 1992–1997. But the surveys in this research include a wider range of demographic distribution in terms of age, the oldest informants being in their 80s. This means that the results must be read against the background of an increasing tendency towards higher levels of education in both societies as a whole.

Additionally, it seems that only relatively few respondents had studied overseas. Among Sri Lankan respondents, only three had studied overseas (4.1 percent): two in India and one in Taiwan. And only eighteen of the Taiwanese respondents (3.7 percent) had studied overseas: eight in the USA, three in Japan, two in Sri Lanka, one each in Thailand, India/Nepal, Hong Kong, mainland China and Canada, and South Africa. Apparently, direct influence from overseas was minimal among the respondents, for so few of them had studied overseas. Yet, one should not exclude the possible foreign influence from other sources (e.g. media, or teachers who had studied overseas).

Table 16 reflects the confusion of the Sri Lankan respondents in the regard to questions about their secular education and formal Buddhist education. The nuns who answered 'Dharma school' and 'nunnery school' as their formal Buddhist education may mean the same thing. Either it refers to special Buddhist educational institutes such as the cases mentioned in Chapter 2, or it might mean education at one's nunnery. I include education at *pirivena* and nuns who specified their BA/MA degrees in Buddhism in the category of 'higher education in Buddhism', while the Buddhism and Oriental Languages exam (*pracheena*) is included in 'Other'.

From Tables 16 and 17, it seems that those with a higher secular education are more likely to have a higher Buddhist education than those with a lower secular education. It is especially so with nuns who have postgraduate secular education. In both the Sri Lankan and Taiwanese surveys, more than half of the nuns with postgraduate secular education had received higher Buddhist education. Among Sri Lankan respondents, the postgraduate secular education might actually mean that the nuns obtained a postgraduate degree from universities in the subject of Buddhism. In other



Table 16 Educational level of Sri Lankan respondents

	School Education	High School Certificate	GCE O level and A level	Secular (%)			
				Under-graduate	Post-graduate	Other	No formal education
Buddhist (%)							No answer
Dharma School	12.9		26.3	25.0		34.2	
Nunnery School	16.1						
Sunday School		50.0	5.3				
Higher education in Buddhism			31.5	25.0	66.6		
Other	16.1		21.1	25.0		34.2	
No formal education	3.2		5.3		16.7	16.7	25.0
No answer	51.7	50.0	10.5	25.0	16.7	16.7	75.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	31	2	19	4	6	6	4

Table 17 Educational level of Taiwanese respondents

<i>Buddhist (%)</i>	<i>Secular (%)</i>				
	<i>Junior High School and below</i>	<i>Senior High School and Vocational School</i>	<i>Junior colleges and universities</i>	<i>Postgraduate</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Never received formal Buddhist education	25.8	23.4	34.0	32.6	16.7
Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*	46.8	31.5	18.0	2.2	8.3
Undergraduate Buddhist education	14.6	28.8	29.3	10.9	50.0
Postgraduate Buddhist education	6.4	13.1	14.7	52.2	8.3
No answer/other	6.4	3.2	4.0	2.1	16.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	62	222	150	46	12

\* Including nuns who had never finished study at a Buddhist college or are currently undergraduate students at Buddhist colleges.

words, the relationship between secular education and formal Buddhist education is not entirely distinguishable among Sri Lankan respondents. On the other hand, since only very few universities in Taiwan offer degrees in religious study, Table 17 gives a clear and more reliable picture that nuns with higher secular education tend to have higher Buddhist education. The results from Tables 16 and 17 show that some of the nuns are intellectually inclined and that if they had pursued higher secular education, they would be more likely to pursue higher Buddhist education.

With regard to gender-related concepts, Table 18 suggests at first sight that among Sri Lankan respondents, the correlation between a nun's educational level and her attitude towards gender-related concepts is not strong. Sri Lankan respondents with undergraduate educational level appear to be the least likely group to disagree with the idea of women's inferior karma. However, a second look reveals that nuns with postgraduate education are more likely than nearly all other groups to disagree with the idea of women's inferior karma. If one is to disregard the finding in the 'undergraduate' group because of its small number of samples, then it seems that education does increase Sri Lankan nuns' confidence in women in regard to gender-related concepts. Taiwanese findings are similar. Table 19 shows that the proportion of Taiwanese nuns who are confident in women in regard to gender-related concepts increases as the level of Buddhist education increases, up to the level of postgraduate Buddhist education. It appears that Buddhist education only contributes to Taiwanese nuns' confidence in women up to a certain level. One might interpret this finding in two ways.

First, one may also notice that in both questions, a substantial proportion of Taiwanese nuns with 'postgraduate Buddhist education' level chose 'other' as their answers. This probably means that nuns with a postgraduate level of education developed better analytical skills in interpreting gender-related concepts, so the answers for them may not be as simple as 'yes' or 'no', the answers provided for in the questionnaire. For example, one Taiwanese nun with postgraduate Buddhist education answered the question regarding women and Buddhahood by pointing out that: 'It is a question of spiritual progress, not a question of sexes' (age 31–40, ordained for 4–10 years). Yet, this interpretation does not stand when considering the result regarding women's karma. Among both Sri Lankan and Taiwanese respondents, it is nuns with minimal education or no formal Buddhist education that were most likely to give 'other' as their answer.

Another interpretation is related to the content in Buddhist scriptures. Chapter 3 has shown that because Buddhist scriptures were mostly written by men, Buddhist scriptures contain androcentric characteristics. A nun who immerses herself in scriptural study may subsequently be influenced by the androcentric teachings in the scriptures and becomes less conscious of gender disparity. Hence, a nun who spends more years in scriptural

Table 18 Gender-related concepts among Sri Lankan respondents. Responses to the question: ‘Do you agree that women were born women because women have less merit than men?’

	School Education	High School Certificate	GCE O level and A level	Under-graduate	Post-graduate	Other	No formal education	No answer
Yes, I agree	6.5	0.0	26.3	75.0	0.0	34.2	50.0	50.0
No, I don't agree	48.4	100.0	47.4	25.0	66.6	66.7	0.0	50.0
I don't know	19.4	0.0	15.8	0.0	16.7	0.0	50.0	0.0
Other	22.6	0.0	10.5	0.0	16.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
No answer	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	31	2	19	4	6	6	2	4

Table 19 Gender-related concepts among Taiwanese respondents

	<i>Never received formal Buddhist education</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>Postgraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>No answer/ other</i>
Responses to the question: 'Do you agree that women were born women because women have less merit than men?'					
Yes, I agree	48.5	43.0	29.7	31.3	50.0
No, I don't agree	27.2	46.9	56.3	47.5	30.0
I don't know	2.2	0.8	1.5	2.5	0.0
Other	22.1	7.0	7.8	17.5	20.0
No answer	0.0	2.3	4.7	1.2	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Responses to the question: 'Do you agree that one can become Buddha in a women's body?'					
Yes, I agree	70.6	75.8	83.6	70.0	45.0
No, I don't agree	11.8	11.7	5.5	11.3	10.0
I don't know/I am not sure	9.5	3.9	4.7	2.5	15.0
Other	5.9	4.7	2.3	12.5	20.0
No answer	2.2	3.9	3.9	3.7	10.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	136	128	128	80	20

\* Including nuns who had never finished study at a Buddhist college or are currently undergraduate students at Buddhist colleges.

study may appear to have less confidence in women by choosing to agree with women's inferior karma and women's unassailability to Buddhahood. Unfortunately, the interview findings fail to reflect the relationship between Buddhist education and gender-related concepts, for among my Taiwanese interviewee nuns with postgraduate Buddhist education, there seemed to be equal numbers of nuns who were conscious or oblivious of gender disparity in regard to gender-related concepts. Nevertheless, it might still be argued that the content of education plays an influential role in the nuns' attitudes toward gender-related concepts. Chapter 3 has shown that there are more androcentric messages in Chinese scriptures than in Pāli scriptures, so perhaps it is not surprising that education helps to increase Sri Lankan nuns' confidence in women but the reverse is true for Taiwanese nuns. In addition, is my observation that, roughly speaking, a nun's gender-related concepts seem to be correlated more with the teachings and orientation of her sangha/monastic teacher than with her level of Buddhist education. That is, a nun from a more androgynous-oriented sangha is more likely to be conscious of gender disparity, regardless of her educational level. Therefore, the educational level is not the only factor affecting a nun's gender-related concepts. As one might expect, the content of a nun's education and the orientation of her sangha play influential roles in determining her attitudes toward gender-related concepts.

Tables 20 and 21 reveal different channels of material sources for Sri Lankan respondents and Taiwanese respondents. Regardless of their educational level, Sri Lankan nuns are most likely to meet their daily expenses from laity's support and performing rituals. While laity's support is the second most likely method for Taiwanese nuns to support themselves, 364 of the Taiwanese respondents (74 percent) chose 'supported by sangha' as their most likely channel for material sources. This probably reflects the cash-offering custom in Taiwan. As mentioned earlier, offering in kind is rare in contemporary Taiwan, and Taiwanese Buddhists usually give cash-offerings to monastics. Hence, a system is required for a sangha to manage laity's cash-offerings to its individual members as well as cash-offerings to the sangha. It means that each monastic member gives the offerings they receive to the management at their sangha, and in return, the sangha will distribute the offerings to its members, perhaps equally or according to seniority. According to my Taiwanese informants, in addition to food and lodging provided at monasteries, there are usually two ways for a sangha to meet each member's personal expenses. Some sangha give the members pocket money and the members need to buy their own necessities through this pocket money. Some sangha, rather than giving members pocket money, require a member to report the items she needs to the management, and the sangha will buy the item for her instead of giving her cash. One Taiwanese respondent specifies the system at her sangha: 'One keeps [a cash-offering] of less than \$2000 NT<sup>24</sup> and one gives half of [the

Table 20 Sri Lankan responses to the question: ‘How do you usually obtain your income and meet your living expenses?’ (multi-answers allowed)

	School education	High School Certificate	GCE O level and A level	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Other	No formal education	No answer	Total (No.)
Supported by laity	19	2	11	3	4	5	2	2	48
Supported by my natal family/personal assets	4	1	6	0	2	0	1	0	14
Supported by sangha	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
By performing rituals	11	1	12	3	3	2	0	1	33
Teaching jobs	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3
No answer	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total number of nuns	31	2	19	4	6	6	2	4	



Table 21 Taiwanese responses to the question: 'How do you usually obtain your income and meet your living expenses?' (multi-answers allowed)

	<i>Never received formal Buddhist education</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>Postgraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>No answer/ other</i>	<i>Total</i>
Supported by laity	52	59	38	29	9	187
Supported by my natal family/personal assets	34	46	27	28	5	140
Supported by sangha	101	90	103	60	10	364
By performing rituals	7	13	19	2	1	42
Teaching jobs	4	0	9	3	0	16
Other	8	9	3	10	3	33
No answer	1	3	4	1	0	9
Total number of nuns	136	128	128	80	20	

\* Including nuns who had never finished study at a Buddhist college or are currently undergraduate students at Buddhist colleges.

cash-offering] to the sangha if the amount exceeds \$2000 NT. We receive regular pocket money [from the sangha]. We can apply for reasonable expenses such as medical expenses with a receipt' (age 31–40, ordained for 4–10 years). A system that manages offerings to sangha and individuals sangha members is common in Taiwan. Hence, not surprisingly, 'supported by sangha' is the most likely method for Taiwanese nuns to meet their expenses.

The situation seems to be different in Sri Lanka. In my observation, cash-offerings to Buddhist monastics are rare, if not taboo, in Sri Lanka, and instead, alms-rounds and offerings in kind are common practices. The fact that two Sri Lankan respondents chose 'supported by sangha' as their method of material sources is rather puzzling. It is possible that they are students and thus rarely go out for alms-rounds and meet their expenses through other sangha members. Or it might be that the two nuns are from an affluent sangha, such as the Sakyadhita Center in the Colombo area, so that wealthy laity and/or foreign donations look after every expense of members of the sangha.

Moreover, although some previous research finds that support from her natal family might account for a Sri Lankan nun's major source for material survival (e.g. Bartholomeusz 1994: 143), this does not show up in my survey. Only fourteen out of the seventy-four Sri Lankan respondents (18.9 percent) cited 'supported by my natal family/personal assets' as their method of meeting expenses. It suggests that the natal family as a nun's major material source may not be as common among Sri Lankan nuns as previously perceived. Or, this finding may simply reflect the absence of urban/rural and class factors in the fieldwork analysis of this research. It is possible that, as Bartholomeusz notes, Sri Lankan women who entered nunhood after Independence tended to be from rural backgrounds and uneducated, and thus had low social status (1994: 130–138). As a result, nuns in the fieldworks of Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra (1987) may have had less support from laity and relied on support from their natal families. But as the *bhikkhuni* movement gained momentum in Sri Lanka over recent years, many women from educated, urban, middle/upper-class backgrounds entered nunhood and they were likely to have better social status than nuns with uneducated, rural and low-class backgrounds. Because of their high social status, the sample nuns in my survey may enjoy better lay support than nuns in the fieldworks of Bartholomeusz (1994) and Devendra (1987). Thus, this finding, rather than contradicting earlier research that their natal family is Sri Lankan nuns' major material source, might simply reflect a change in Sri Lankan nuns' backgrounds – that increasingly, Sri Lankan nuns are coming from a wider range of backgrounds than earlier periods.

On the other hand, a higher percentage of Taiwanese respondents (28.5 percent) chose 'supported by my natal family/personal assets' as their

channel of material sources. It shows that either Taiwanese nuns are more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to support themselves through their natal families, or they do not give up their personal assets after ordination. Indeed, I know of some Taiwanese nuns who kept their personal assets after ordination. For example, I met a Taiwanese nun during my Sri Lankan fieldwork. She kept the apartment she bought before her ordination. After ordination, the rent from the apartment became the monetary source that enabled her to travel to Sri Lanka and keep a lifestyle of full-time meditation.

It seems that there is no correlation between a nun's educational level and how she feels about her life as a Buddhist nun. Table 22 shows that there is no obvious correlation between educational level and satisfaction with nunhood. The majority of Sri Lankan nuns appeared to feel comfortable about their nunhood. Yet, it is interesting to note that while highly educated nuns may be less likely to feel comfortable about their nunhood (34.2 percent among nuns with postgraduate education), so may the nuns with little education (50.0 percent among nuns with no formal education). The correlation between educational level and satisfaction with nunhood is not obvious in the Taiwanese findings either. Although the proportion of Taiwanese nuns choosing 'harsh' as their answer decreases as the educational level increases, nuns with no formal Buddhist education and with postgraduate Buddhist education are equally unlikely to choose 'comfortable' as their answer (Table 23). Again, it is important to bear in mind that this question is a subjective one. It is possible that nuns with higher education are more likely than nuns with lower education to aspire to upward social mobility, and thus, in both Sri Lankan and Taiwanese findings, nuns with postgraduate education are least likely to feel content about their current situation.

It is interesting to note that in the Sri Lankan findings, except for the 'postgraduate' and 'no answer' groups, more than half of nuns in all other groups chose 'comfortable' as their answer (Table 22). On the other hand, less than half of Taiwanese nuns in all groups chose 'comfortable' as their answer (Table 23). The Buddhist nuns' order in Sri Lanka is often perceived as economically deprived and socially disrespected (e.g. Bartholomeusz 1994), while Buddhist nuns' orders in Taiwan are perceived as prosperous (e.g. Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 19–21). Yet, Tables 22 and 23 show that Sri Lankan nuns appear to be more contented with their nunhood than Taiwanese nuns. It might be explained by answers provided by some Sri Lankan respondents who went on to specify why they felt comfortable about their nunhood. For example, a Sri Lankan respondent who chose 'comfortable' as her answer wrote 'mental happiness' (age 51–60, ordained for 11–20 years) at the end of her answer. This is a reminder that happiness is a very subjective matter; as such, material concerns and/or social status may not be the basis for a nun to judge her life. A nun may not be interested in material attainment and social status, while a researcher

Table 22 Sri Lankan responses to the question: ‘How do you find your life as a Buddhist nun?’

	School education	High School Certificate	GCE O level and A level	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Other	No formal education	No answer
Harsh	3.2				16.7	16.7		50.0
Often difficult			10.5			16.7	50.0	25.0
Comfortable	77.4	100.0	84.2	100.0	34.2	50.0	50.0	25.0
Other	12.9		5.3		50.0	16.7		
No answer	6.5							
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	31	2	19	4	6	6	2	4

Table 23 Taiwanese responses to the question: ‘How do you find your life as a Buddhist nun?’

	<i>Never received formal Buddhist education</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>Postgraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>No answer/other</i>
Harsh	7.4	8.6	7.0	5.0	30.0
Often difficult	19.1	14.8	14.1	18.8	0.0
Comfortable	21.3	42.2	30.5	20.0	10.0
Other	51.5	26.6	39.8	53.7	60.0
No answer	0.7	7.8	8.6	2.5	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	136	128	128	80	20

\* Including nuns who had never finished study at a Buddhist college or are currently undergraduate students at Buddhist colleges.

from a capitalist background and/or trained in secular disciplines might consider material attainment and social status as the essential basis for a nun's welfare.

Table 24 shows a positive correlation between educational level and the treatment of nuns by laity in Sri Lanka. Comparing the groups of 'school education', 'GCE O level and A level' 'undergraduate' and 'postgraduate', it appears that as educational level increases, the nuns' perception of laity's treatment towards them improves, that the higher their education, the less likely a nun sees a preferential treatment for monks by laity. The Taiwanese findings (Table 25) appear to be in a reverse direction, for as the level of Buddhist education increases, Taiwanese respondents are increasingly likely to perceive a preferential treatment for monks by laity. Taiwanese respondents with postgraduate Buddhist education are the most likely group to perceive a preferential treatment for monks by laity. While it might be argued that in Sri Lanka, because education brings social prestige to nuns, nuns with higher education tend to be better treated by laity, the Taiwanese findings require further interpretation. I have already noted that many of my Taiwanese interviewee nuns complained about laity's preferential treatment of monks. This seems to be consistent with the survey findings that education does not necessarily bring equal treatment from laity, and Taiwanese laity generally prefers monks to nuns.

On the other hand, as the educational level increases, nuns seem to be increasingly likely to complain about unequal access to various affairs such as preaching. It might be interpreted as that while Sri Lankan laity holds little or no preferential treatment toward nuns and monks, there exist obstacles against Buddhist nuns' upward mobility within the monastic community. That is, there seems to be a 'glass ceiling' that prevents Sri Lankan nuns from moving up to higher than a certain level, so that nuns with higher education may not be able to compete fairly with monks of the same level of education. As such, nuns with higher education are more likely to perceive unequal access to various affairs than nuns with lower education. Or, similar to the interpretation of the findings in Tables 22 and 23, it might be interpreted as nuns with higher education being more likely to aspire to upward social mobility than nuns with lower education. Naturally, nuns who make more effort for upward social mobility would encounter more obstacles than others. The Taiwanese findings reveal a similar pattern. Nuns with postgraduate Buddhist education are more likely than any other groups to think that nuns have less access than monks to various affairs. Yet, prior to the level of postgraduate Buddhist education, the proportion of Taiwanese nuns who perceive equal access to various affairs increases as the level of Buddhist education increases (Table 25). Upward mobility within the monastic community seems to be more difficult for nuns than for monks. This is in addition to the fact that Taiwanese nuns with higher Buddhist education are more likely than nuns with lower

Table 24 Views on conditions for monks and nuns among Sri Lankan respondents

	School education	High School Certificate	GCE O level and A level	Undergraduate	Postgraduate	Other	No formal education	No answer
Responses to the question: 'In terms of material welfare, do you think that laity treats monks and nuns equally?'								
Yes, I think so	19.4		10.5	75.0	34.2	50.0		25.0
No, I think that laity treats nuns better				25.0		16.7		50.0
No, I think that laity treats monks better	58.1	100.0	57.9		16.7	16.7	100.0	25.0
Other	9.6		21.1		16.7			
No answer	12.9		10.5		34.2	16.7		
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.0	100.0
Responses to the question: 'In general, do you think that monks and nuns have equal access to affairs such as sangha management, preaching, and receiving Buddhist education?'								
Yes, I think so	29.0	50.0	10.5	25.0		16.7		50.0
No, I think the nuns have less access	45.2	50.0	57.9	50.0	84.2	34.2	50.0	50.0
No, I think the monks have less access	3.2							
I don't know								
Other	9.7		5.3	25.0		34.2		
No answer	12.9		26.3		16.7	16.7	50.0	
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	31	2	19	4	6	6	2	4

Table 25 Views on conditions for monks and nuns among Taiwanese respondents

	<i>Never received formal Buddhist education</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*</i>	<i>Undergraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>Postgraduate Buddhist education</i>	<i>No answer/other</i>
Responses to the question: 'In terms of material welfare, do you think that laity treats monks and nuns equally?'					
Yes, I think so	42.6	46.9	46.1	31.2	25.0
No, I think that laity treats nuns better			0.8		
No, I think that laity treats monks better	25.0	25.8	27.3	33.8	30.0
Other	28.7	20.3	18.8	31.3	40.0
No answer	3.7	7.0	7.0	3.7	5.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Responses to the question: 'In general do you think that monks and nuns have equal access to affairs such as sangha management, preaching, and receiving Buddhist education?'					
Yes, I think so	59.6	71.1	82.8	61.2	30.0
No, I think the nuns have less access	10.3	8.6	5.5	15.0	15.0
No, I think the monks have less access		2.3		1.3	
I don't know	8.1	7.8	3.1	7.5	25.0
Other	19.1	5.5	3.9	12.5	25.0
No answer	2.9	4.7	4.7	2.5	5.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	136	128	128	80	20

\* Including nuns who had never finished study at a Buddhist college or are currently undergraduate students at Buddhist colleges.



Buddhist education to perceive a preferential treatment for monks from laity.

Overall, the survey is consistent with Malhortra and Mather's research that education does not automatically empower women and that social/cultural factors also affect women's empowerment (1997) for, in the Taiwanese case, education does not improve the laity's treatment towards nuns, and in both the Sri Lankan and Taiwanese cases, nuns with higher education are more likely than nuns with lower education to find upward mobility difficult. This result suggests that while education may help to improve Buddhist nuns' welfare, how education might help depends on the social and cultural contexts of a nun's situation. However, rather than seeing the difficulty for nuns' upward social mobility as a 'Buddhist problem', it might be more appropriate to see the findings in Tables 24 and 25 as a reflection of the wider society. That is, the survey is a reflection of sexist practices in the wider society in Sri Lanka and Taiwan. In Sri Lanka, female labor tends to be devalued and women tend to receive less pay than men (De Zoysa 1995: 227–228). Worse, the patriarchal perception regarding female labor persists (e.g. the perception that female laborers are easier to control than male laborers). As a result, women in South Asia (including Sri Lanka) are exploited in the labor markets that do not require their education (Clark 1993: 14), or to be recruited only to jobs that are traditionally defined as female work (e.g. tea pickers, sewing girls, etc.) (Samarasinghe 1998). Although Sri Lanka has a female president, the number of female politicians is far less than male politicians and it is difficult for Sri Lankan women in general to gain access to political power (Shastri 1993). Taiwan is far from being a gender-equal society and women are discriminated against in politics, jobs and income. It is especially worthy of notice that in Taiwan, the old cultural preference for educated males persists, for only when there is a shortage of educated males, might employers employ educated females (Brinton *et al.* 1995). Therefore, the findings in Tables 24 and 25 reflect the general social conditions in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, indicating that sexism, which penetrates Sri Lankan and Taiwanese societies, also penetrates Buddhist organizations. It shows that a religious community can hardly isolate itself from the influence of the wider society, as every social, historical, cultural, political and economic factor in the wider society is likely to have effects on religious communities.

### *Summary*

This section investigates the educational factor on the welfare of Buddhist nuns. Overall, Buddhist nuns regard education highly, with the emphasis on Dharma as an inseparable element in all types of education.

Although education seems to improve the nuns' welfare, the broader socio-economic context also plays a great role. Despite the fact that, generally

speaking, the Taiwanese nuns' order seems to enjoy a better social status and material welfare than the Sri Lankan nuns' order, it appears that while education improves the laity's treatment towards the nuns in Sri Lanka, it is not necessarily the case in Taiwan. The prosperity of the Taiwanese nuns' order, then, should be attributed to other factors such as the general economic condition, the prevalence of the Ch'an Buddhist ethic of supporting oneself through work etc. In other words, in the dimension of Buddhist nuns' welfare, non-religious factors are as influential as religious factors.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that Sri Lankan nuns seem to be more contented with their nunhood than Taiwanese nuns. This is in spite of the perception that Taiwanese nuns generally enjoy better social status and material welfare than Sri Lankan nuns. Apparently, worldly concerns may not be the basis for a nun to judge the welfare of her life. In other words, determining Buddhist nuns' welfare on the basis of material attainment may be a Western or capitalist bias and will not reflect the values that Buddhist nuns hold.

### **The mixed-sex sangha**

The issue of the mixed-sex sangha first came to my attention because of a statement by Rita Gross:

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that frequently the motivation behind male preference for sex-segregated monasteries is a projection of male sexual urges onto women and the men's desire to have their celibacy protected at any cost. . . . On the other hand, if monks and nuns studied and meditated together, which is by far the most practical solution to the problem of providing training for both of them, the quality of the celibacy would be higher and more genuine. It would be based more on personal taming and less on an artificial separation. Celibacy that can be maintained only by sex segregation is rather shallow. Another casualty of too much sex segregation is barely mentioned in these debates. Human beings of 'neighboring sexes' can have meaningful and mutually helpful friendships. . . . To live the spiritual life as if that were not a basic truth of relative existence, to live with contact only with one of the sexes, is artificial, unhealthy, and insane. . . . Western rather than Asian monasteries are the more likely pioneering places for this innovation [of establishing mixed-sex sangha].

(1993: 248–249)

Gross seems to associate the establishment of mixed-sex sangha with a feminist agenda. Yet, contrary to what she believes, the mixed-sex sangha would

not be a Western innovation, for it has had a long presence in Taiwan. Because mixed-sex sangha do not exist in Sri Lanka, this section focuses solely on Taiwan.

The issue of mixed-sex sangha itself is significant to the interest of this research, for it brings up the question of the *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka. Among the reasons given by my Sri Lankan informants for refuting the higher ordination transmitted by Mahāyāna sangha is the accusation over the sanction of sexual activities to Mahāyāna monks and nuns. This means that the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Taiwan would be invalid, if Taiwanese *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* engage in sexual activities as some of my Sri Lankan informants believed. This is clearly based on a misunderstanding and a generalization of practices of a few Mahāyāna sects. It must be pointed out that not all Mahāyāna monks and nuns are allowed to engage in sexual activities, for clerical marriage is mostly found in the Japanese tradition,<sup>25</sup> some of Tibetan sects,<sup>26</sup> the Newar Buddhism of Nepal,<sup>27</sup> and more recently, in Western Buddhism. Although historically in Taiwan, clerical marriage was allowed in some *zhaijiao* sects (Table 5), it must be remembered that *zhaijiao* members follow only the five basic Buddhist precepts and are not considered *bhikkhu/bhikkhunī*. Furthermore, Orthodox Chinese Buddhism does not consider *zhaijiao* a 'pure' Buddhism and usually exclude *zhaijiao* from contemporary Buddhist discourse in Taiwan.

My Sri Lankan informants' accusation nevertheless brings up the issue of the mixed-sex sangha, even though it is unlikely that they were familiar with the Taiwanese model of mixed-sex sangha. Their misconception about sexual sanction in all Mahāyāna sects is likely to have derived from the perception of sexual practice in Tibetan tantric Buddhism, which is better known in Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism appears largely in the form of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, which demands strict sex segregation, the mixed-sex sangha is common in Taiwan. By making clear the distinction between the mixed-sex sangha and clerical marriage in Taiwanese Buddhism, this section is partly my attempt to refute the misconception found among some of my Sri Lankan informants regarding sexual activities in Mahāyāna tradition, and partly, to examine the relation between mixed-sex sangha and the feminist agenda.

### History

Throughout the Buddhist world, it is not uncommon to find a group of nuns who live at the edge of a monks' monastery and who are affiliated with the same lineage as the neighboring monks (e.g. Tibetan nuns in Kim Gutschow 2004). The Taiwanese model of mixed-sex sangha is slightly different, because instead of living at the edge of the monks' monastery, Taiwanese nuns may live at the same premises, usually within the same

temple walls, as the monks. And rather than being marginalized by the monks' sangha in terms of training, rights to perform rituals, decision-making, etc., the resident nuns and monks of a Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha generally have almost equal access to training, sangha affairs, material sources, etc., albeit that, as will be shown later, gender inequality still exists. And nuns and monks of a typical Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha are perceived by the laity and other sangha as members of the same organization rather than two separate organizations with the same lineage. Both genders in a typical Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha are expected to have the same roles, and both are treated as full members of the sangha. To some extent, nuns in a typical Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha are not expected to play a marginalized and supportive role to the monks such as the case of Tibetan nuns in Gutschow (2004). Hence, the Taiwanese model of the mixed-sex sangha is unique in Buddhist Asia.

The mixed-sex Buddhist community has had a long presence in Taiwan, probably since the earliest days of the introduction of Buddhism to the island. Jiang Yuying, a Qing official to Taiwan (1684–1689), was shocked by what he saw at Buddhist temples. He recorded:

They gather together to talk about Buddha and spirits. But they don't hold strict vegetarian diet. . . . Men and women, young and old, often go to temples together for Dharma sermon. It is difficult to tell who is a monastic and who is a layperson. They appear to know no moral, for they shamelessly mingle among the opposite sex.  
(quoted in Yin 1994: 19)

What Jiang Yuyin observed was likely to be a *zhaijiao* practice rather than an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist practice. Given the prevalence of *zhaijiao* in Taiwan in the early days, it is likely that what Jiang Yuyin observed was common. Moreover, since he appeared to be shocked by the lack of sex segregation at Taiwanese Buddhist temples, Jiang Yuyin's statement indicates that sex segregation (and a vegetarian diet) was expected of monastics in Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, which he was accustomed to in mainland China. Even with the coming of large numbers of mainland Chinese refugee monks after 1949 and their attempts to establish Orthodox Chinese Buddhism on the island, variations between Buddhism in Taiwan and Orthodox Chinese Buddhism have continued to exist. One of the variations exhibited is the mixed-sex sangha, still commonly found in contemporary Taiwan.

The origin of the mixed-sex sangha in Taiwan is often 'blamed' on the influence of Japanese Buddhism. Since many Japanese Buddhist sects permit clerical marriage, there is a tendency to hold Japanese Buddhism responsible for the negligence of the Vinaya observance in the early periods of Taiwan. However, I find this interpretation dubious. As Jiang Yuying's

statement, quoted earlier, testifies, the mixed-sex Buddhist communities had existed in Taiwan prior to the Japanese colonization, albeit that they may not have been the Vinaya-based monasticism. Charles Jones does not specifically deal with the issue of the mixed-sex sangha, but he does mention how a sangha in the prewar Taiwan dealt with the issue of mixed-sex residency:

In 1908, a woman arrived [at Chaofeng Temple] seeking a place to practice religious austerities. [*Bhikkhu*] Yongding [the abbot] was thirty-one years old, the woman twenty-seven, and he realized that cohabitation in the same temple would offend not only his own sensibilities, but in all likelihood those of his donors as well. Consequently, he ordered the construction of bamboo-and-thatch buildings at a respectable distance down the mountain, and he named them Longhu Convent. This establishment enjoyed even more success than the Chaofeng Temple itself; within two years it had ninety-four women in residence and outgrew its facilities. This forced [*bhikkhu*] Yongding, as abbot of both temples, to divide his fundraising activities in order to keep up with the rapid growth of the Longhu Convent while pursuing his original plans for renovating the Chaofeng Temple. . . . By 1935 the convent's resident population had grown to over 140 women. . . . However, none of the women who lived at the Longhu Convent ever sought ordination as Buddhist nuns; apparently [*bhikkhu*] Yongding did not insist that they take this step. The full-time residents wore white tunics over long black pants, and tied their hair in topknots. [*Bhikkhu*] Yongding's first female disciple, Kaihui, succeeded him as abbess of the convent after his death in 1939; but it was not until after [the end of the Second World War] that she took the full nun's precepts. In 1953, at the first BAROC-sponsored ordination session at the Daxian Temple in Tainan county, she went with fifteen other residents of the convent. Fifteen of them took the full precepts of the [*bhikkhuni*], while one took the novice's precepts. By this time, Kaihui was seventy-two years old.

(1999: 58–59)

The statement above gives a glimpse into a non-*zhaijiao* and non-Vinaya-based nunhood, though no further discussion follows. More importantly, it reveals that even during the Japanese colonial period, a Vinaya-based sangha still had to be cautious about the cohabitation of the two sexes. Hence, it is unlikely that the existence of the mixed-sex sangha in Taiwan was solely a result of Japanese Buddhist influence.

It is the Vinaya-based sangha that this section is interested in, for unless a nun can claim to be a *bhikkhuni* and have the qualification as

a preceptor at a *bhikkhunī* ordination, there is little concern between her monastic status and the *bhikkhunī* issue in Sri Lanka. However, even when the Vinaya is concerned, there seems to be no rule against the mixed-sex sangha. Neither *bhikkhunī* Wu-yin's commentary on the *bhikkhunī* precepts (2001) nor Wijayaratna's study on the *bhikkhunī* sangha (2001) deals specifically with this issue. The most relevant precept that I found is that:

Whatever Bhikkhunī should knowingly enter a monastic residence where a Bhikkhu lives, without asking for permission, she is guilty of a fault of [transgression].

(quoted from Wijayaratna 2001: 197)

But, as will be shown later, a typical Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha does not violate this precept.

What is puzzling is that, in spite of the mainlander monks' eagerness to eliminate what they considered heretical practices in Taiwanese Buddhism, and BAROC's decades-long monopoly over monastic ordination (Jones 1999: 149–152), the mixed-sex sangha continues to exist. I would suggest that the continuous existence of the Vinaya-based, mixed-sex sangha in Taiwan is connected, not with Japanese Buddhist influence, but with the social unrest during the postwar era. For the mainlander monks and nuns who retreated with the Chinese Nationalist (KMT) regime to Taiwan after 1949, life was not easy. Away from home and probably penniless, refugee monks and nuns were deprived of their livelihood (Jones 1999: 105–106). Because of such a difficult situation, sex-segregation was unlikely to be the first thing in the minds of the refugee monastics, despite the fact that they may have been taught to follow the sex-segregation rule in Orthodox Chinese Buddhism. The monks may have had little choice but to accept the help and lodging offered by native Taiwanese Buddhist women. For example, *bhikkhu* Yinshun recalls:

I had joined the sangha for more than twenty years and while in the mainland China, I had always lived at male-only monasteries. After coming to Taiwan, during the period of the search for a land to establish a monastery, I had no choice but to accept the lodging at Yitong Nunnery. I had not much knowledge about the large number of Taiwanese Buddhist women (including both the nuns and *zhaijiao* women).<sup>28</sup>

Since the mixed-sex Buddhist community had existed in Taiwan prior to 1949, it should not be difficult for Taiwanese Buddhists to accept the mixed-sex sangha. To this day, the Vinaya-based mixed-sex sangha continues to exist in Taiwan and has become one of the major characteristics of

contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism. This is in spite of the fact that contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism is within the orbit of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, which demands strict sex segregation.

The next section will discuss the characteristics of Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha, to make a clear distinction between the mixed-sex sangha and sexual sanction.

### *Characteristics*

It is important to note that while Taiwanese monks and nuns may live at the same premises, it does not follow that sexual activities are allowed to them. In accordance with Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, a strict vegetarian diet and celibacy are expected for Taiwanese Buddhist monks and nuns. The allocation of buildings at all mixed-sex sangha that I have visited follow more or less the same pattern: buildings for public functions such as the Buddha Hall, office and classrooms are located in the middle of the premises, separating the monks' and nuns' living quarters, which are then located on the opposite sides of the premises. Each mixed-sex sangha has its own rules regulating the conduct of its members with the opposite sex, and these are strictly non-sexual activities. Usually, it is only in the public places that interactions with the opposite sex are permitted, and it can be seen that even in the case of the mixed-sex sangha interaction of any kind between the sexes is heavily restricted. The accusation that all Mahāyāna monks and nuns are allowed to engage in sexual activities is thus unfounded. In Sri Lanka, where Theravāda Buddhism dominates and the varieties of Buddhism in the wider world are unfamiliar, it is perhaps the more sensational yet less representative forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism that dominate the discourse. It is possible that the increasing number of celibate monks and nuns from Mahāyāna traditions studying at universities in Sri Lanka might gradually alter this perception.

Another characteristic of Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha is the male leadership and the overwhelming number of female members. Regardless of the numerical dominance of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns, the leaders of nearly all mixed-sex sangha are male. Female abbacy in a mixed-sex sangha is extremely rare. In fact, I know of only one such case. Chitian Si Temple, a mixed-sex sangha in Southern Taiwan, once had a *bhikkhunī* abbess (*bhikkhunī* Chingliu). Though *bhikkhunī* Chingliu was still alive (in her 90s) at the time of writing, she had given the abbacy to a *bhikkhu* in 1997. Regretfully, I was unable to find out more about her.

Usually, a mixed-sex sangha is led by a monk founder/abbot, with a small number of monk members and an overwhelming number of nun members. Three out of the four largest Taiwanese Buddhist organizations (Chungtai<sup>29</sup>, Dharma Drum Mountain<sup>30</sup> and Foguangshan) cited by Jiang (2000: 72–111) are mixed-sex sangha, founded and led by a mainland



monk with a large number of nun members. Another one on Jiang's list is Tzu Chi, which has a female-only sangha and is founded and led by a nun; but its founder, *bhikkhuni* Cheng-Yen, is a disciple of a mainland monk (Chapter 2). It seems that the prestige enjoyed by mainland monks during the postwar era contributes a great deal to the construction of the monk-teacher and nun-students structure at the mixed-sex sangha. An article by mainland *bhikkhu* Dongchu in 1950 notes:

Taiwanese Buddhists have no education. They join a temple and all they do is to learn some rituals and minor texts. . . . What Buddhism in Taiwan needs today is education. . . . There are more than two thousand Buddhist monks, nuns and *zhaijiao* women in Taiwan (the number of monks is less than one-tenth of the nuns). Less than ten percent of them ever directly received the real Buddhist education.

(Dongchu Shi 1979: 110)

The statement above indicates that most Taiwanese Buddhist monastics at that time were nuns or *zhaijiao* women, and the majority of them had not received adequate or 'real' Buddhist education (by the standard of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism). With the coming of many prestigious refugee monks from mainland China, who were 'the cream of the Chinese Buddhist order, monks of nationwide stature and impressive credentials' (Jones 1999: 150), it is not difficult to imagine that native Taiwanese nuns and *zhaijiao* women, being impressed by the knowledge and prestige of mainland monks, flocked to seek their teachings. As the mainland refugee monks needed support from native Taiwanese women in order to sustain their livelihood, it was unlikely that they would turn away women who sought to be their disciples. Consequently, the structure of monk-teacher and nun-disciples came to exist, or continued to exist (leaders in *zhaijiao* and Japanese Buddhism were also predominately male). This is exemplified in a statement from a nun of a mixed-sex sangha:

What can we do? This [situation of mixed-sex sangha] already happened. You can't tell us not to recognize him [the teacher-founder of the sangha] as our master!

(TN8, age 50, ordained for 20 years)

More significantly, the lack of female leadership in Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha is related to cultural factors. Many of my Taiwanese informants found the idea of a nun having monk-disciples unthinkable, even though the idea of a monk having female-disciples is completely uncontroversial. When I asked why leadership in nearly all mixed-sex sangha is male, one nun explained:



If something happens, whom do you think will be imprisoned? Always the leader! If anything happens, it is always the leader who must go to prison. Which one is smarter then? As far as I know, [it is the nuns themselves who do not want to become the leaders]. One reason is because female leadership does not appear to be powerful enough. In a Chinese society, it is still better to have male leadership. 'A woman usurping man's power [brings misfortune]'<sup>31</sup> If you are the one who has the real power, to seek the leadership title will only make enemies. [Nuns] are more practical. They feel that it is more useful to have real power than to have the crowd's applauses.

(TN9, in her 40s, ordained for 19 years)

As TN9 bluntly put it, female leadership in Taiwan still does not endorse the same powerful image as male leadership. She even cited the old saying, 'A woman usurping man's power brings misfortune' to illustrate how difficult it is in a Chinese society for female leadership to emerge. In fact, Taiwanese women's advancement in the public sphere enjoys little gender equality; the old cultural preference for educated male workers persists (Brinton *et al.* 1995), as does the Taiwanese Buddhist laity's general preference for monks. Such a preference for male leadership might be due to Confucian influence, for Taiwan is still by and large, a Confucian society. Given Confucianism's preoccupation with patriarchal morality (see Nyitray 2000: 182–189), and the importance it gives to the male heir of the family lineage (Chow Kai-wing 1994), it is not surprising that historically, Chinese women were excluded from the public sphere and even within the private sphere, excluded from being the head of the family. Chinese Buddhism has always had to negotiate with Confucianism (Ching 1999). Since in Confucianism, female leadership is frowned upon, contemporary Taiwanese Buddhists may, perhaps unconsciously, find it difficult to accept female leadership. If the society at large is unfavorable of female leadership, it is difficult for a subgroup (e.g. a religious community) being affected by the general social norm of that society, to give rise to female leadership. In other words, because the social condition in Taiwan is unfavorable to female leadership, it is difficult for female leadership to surface at a mixed-sex sangha in spite of the numerical dominance of nuns.

Yet, TN9 also pointed out, leadership titles aside, the 'real power' in many mixed-sex sangha is actually in the hands of the nuns rather than monks. By 'real power', she probably referred to the decision-making power. I have noticed this, too. For example, in a mixed-sex sangha I visited, my informants told me that it was a senior nun, rather than the young abbot, who held the 'real power' in the sangha. When I asked the senior nun whether she ever wanted to be the abbess, she seemed disturbed and asked why would she want the title, which was nothing but illusion? She went

on to say that the title of the abbess would only mean many extra social appointments ('just look at our poor abbot!') and could interfere with one's spiritual practice. Her words seem to have a point, for leadership probably means a great degree of dealing with mundane affairs and might lead one astray from concentrating on spiritual practice. Another nun of a mixed-sex sangha also claimed that the position of abbot/abbess is not a desirable job:

We did not purposely choose a male abbot. Take [our current abbot] for example. He has been ordained for more than thirty years and contributed a great deal to the sangha. As a senior Dharma brother, he simply is the natural choice. . . . No, [it is not to refuse the nuns the leadership]. Sometimes we are all very humble. If you see us from the outside, you may not see the whole picture. When we insiders talk about this, we may say, 'You are all very subjective'. . . . Being an abbot/abbess is a difficult task. It seems that the abbot/abbess has everyone's support, but he/she must be decisive. You must have the ability to foresee the direction of the sangha. It is a job that you have to work at laboriously but it may only earn criticisms. So, almost none of us wanted this job.

(TN17, in her 40s, ordained for more than 20 years)

TN17 attributed the male leadership in her sangha to the laborious task and undesirability of the abbot/abbess position. She seemed to suggest that questioning the male leadership in her sangha is nothing more than a subjective interpretation of an outsider (the researcher) and may not necessarily reflect the real interests of an insider (the nuns).

Such an interpretation nevertheless falls short of the feminist agenda. Rita Gross, for instance, argues that recognizing and empowering female gurus and lineage holders is crucial for postpatriarchal Buddhism (1996: 235–237). The lack of female leadership means that nuns may never become lineage holders in the mixed-sex sangha and this means that a true post-patriarchal Buddhism would never be constructed. Furthermore, as argued earlier, female leadership is frowned upon in the Confucian society historically and it is still difficult for female leadership to emerge in contemporary Taiwan. Even though TN9 and TN17 argued that it is out of the concerns of laborious responsibility and practical needs that capable and powerful nuns do not seek the leadership status in their sangha, the mere fact that they had to rationalize the capable and powerful nuns' subordination in the sangha hierarchy is a manifestation of female subordination. Hence, TN9 and TN17's reasoning for the lack of female leadership in their sangha reflects not only the limited scope for Taiwanese women to move upward in the public sphere but also the nuns' internalization of female subordination. Seen from this perspective, the absence of female leadership

in the mixed-sex sangha means a permanently subordinate status of nuns in Buddhist institutions and might thus be destructive towards a true gender-egalitarian relationship in Buddhism.

In addition, the scarcity of monks in Taiwan becomes an obstacle against female leadership, for nuns might internalize the 'need' to 'treasure' monks and to offer monks extra privileges. A nun of a mixed-sex sangha said:

Nowadays, a man needs great merit to enter the monastic order. [In our sangha], we have more nuns. Taiwan has more nuns than monks, at a ratio of three to one, or at least four to one. I have never counted the number, but it seems that there are more nuns than monks. Every time we have a ritual, there are always more women than men. . . . Nowadays, a monk is a real treasure!  
(TN8, age 50, ordained for 20 years)

Perhaps the concern of losing the monks' order altogether drives some nuns to see monks as 'treasures' and consequently, intentionally, give monks privileges. These nuns are unlikely to compete with the monks over leadership.

Regardless of the historical, cultural and spiritual reasons discussed so far, the biggest obstacle in the way of female leadership at the mixed-sex sangha probably lies in the scriptures. As far as I know, there is no precedent in Buddhist texts for a nun ordaining a monk. On the other hand, the *Cullavagga* provides the precedent that permits monks to give the *bhikkhuni* ordination in the absence of an existing *bhikkhuni* order (Goonatilake 2001: 3). Hence, the lack of a precedent in the scriptures makes it hard for a nun to start a mixed-sex sangha, since she is not allowed to ordain men. Most mixed-sex sangha in Taiwan began with the structure of male-teacher and female-disciples and then went on to establish a lineage of mixed-sex sangha. Since a nun is not allowed to ordain men, it is unlikely that she can start a mixed-sex sangha on her own. It is exemplified in one nun's account:

During the construction [of the current temple], one of the builders developed the thought of awakening (*bōdhicitta*) and he wanted to be ordained. But he is a man. There were many obstacles in his path. After these obstacles were resolved, I must help him in his Buddha path. So I took him to my home temple and asked my teacher [who is a monk] to give him ordination.  
(TN2, age 53, ordained for 19 years)

Although the teacher of TN2 was a monk, the thought of her receiving a male monastic disciple did not occur to her. As such, female leadership in the traditional form of monastic orders seems unlikely to be common in Taiwan in the foreseeable future.

It is in the modern form of Buddhist organization that female leadership is more likely to happen. By 'modern form', I mean organizations that are not structured on the basis of the Vinaya and traditional Chinese sangha rules, such as Buddhist colleges and Buddhist charity organizations that are regulated to meet contemporary needs rather than the rules laid down in ancient India or China. For example, when *bhikkhuni* Heng-Ching became the head of Dharma Light Buddhist Institute,<sup>32</sup> she was certainly in a leadership position over the monk-students and monk-staffs at the Institute.

Having discussed the history and characteristics of the mixed-sex sangha in contemporary Taiwan, I will now move on to discuss the relation between the mixed-sex sangha and nuns' welfare.

### *Reasons for or against the mixed-sex sangha*

Although mixed-sex sangha are common in contemporary Taiwan, most of my Taiwanese nun informants preferred the female-only sangha. In fact, some sangha that were previously mixed-sex are now divided into female-only and male-only sangha.

Nevertheless, one of my interviewee nuns, who was ordained in a female-only sangha but had the chance to study at a male-only monastery of another tradition, echoed Gross's preference for mixed-sex sangha:

The main point is the separation of living quarters. Like what we are doing now is very clear: monks live at one side and nuns live at the other side. A female-only sangha could be shallow, because of the educational background, social position and the level of its social conduct. In a mixed-sex sangha, there are always more possibilities after dissolving a problem. If the teacher has enough insight and open-mindedness, then there will be mutual advancement [for both sexes]. Men can understand women better; they would not think, 'women are all like this'. If nuns live with monks, then the nuns can leave all the heavy labor work to the monks. There are also things nuns can learn from male management. I think it's mutual learning. . . . I have lived at a male-only monastery and I have lived at female-only monastery. From what I have experienced, I think the Taiwanese model is the best. That is, monks on one side and nuns on the other side, but there are chances for interactions.

(TN9, in her 40s, ordained for 19 years)

It must be pointed out that when I mentioned the name, 'Rita Gross', TN9 did not seem to have heard of it. So, the statement above is likely to be TN9's own independent opinion. The wording might be different, but the concerns of TN9 are similar to Rita Gross's. They both recognize the

mutual understanding that monks and nuns can learn from each other at a mixed-sex sangha, and they do not seem to think that living at the same premises might distort monastic celibacy. Most of my informants, however, prefer the female-only sangha, and the most common reason is the concern over celibacy. One nun explained:

I often say: 'The twenty years of hard work by *bhikkhunī* might be destroyed by *bhikkhu* in only five minutes'. Isn't it so? Don't they destroy [the hard work of *bhikkhunī*] in only five minutes? It takes only one scandal to destroy the positive image that we work so hard to build. You see, who caused all these recent scandals? It's all *bhikkhu*'s problems! The Catholic Church is the same. Whether it is in the Britain or in the US, so many priests cause troubles. Even the Church has to pay compensation money for them! . . . It is not merely possible that many women are more advanced in the spiritual practices than men; it is without doubt.

(TN13, age 59, ordained for 27 years)

The statement of TN13 reveals the confidence of and in Buddhist nuns. While she felt confident of nuns' ability, she also felt frustrated about monks' faults. The best solution, then, is to have separate sangha for nuns and monks. The fear of distorting celibacy is shared by many of my informants who prefer the female-only sangha. Apparently, more Taiwanese Buddhist nuns prefer the female-only sangha than the mixed-sex sangha.

Additionally, it must be mentioned that a Taiwanese nun who advocated the female-only sangha did not do so out of concern for celibacy but out of her concern for nuns' empowerment. *Bhikkhunī* Tianyi (1924–1980), mentioned in Chapter 2, saw establishing the female-only sangha as a way of empowering nuns. According to her, in a mixed-sex sangha, difficult tasks, heavy labor work and decision-making might be done entirely by monks, so such a condition would deprive nuns the chance to experience and learn *everything* (Jianye Shi 1999: 148–150). She argues that learning to do everything by oneself is crucial for nuns to become self-reliant. In addition, my Luminary nun informants, who are 'Dharma descendants' of *bhikkhunī* Tianyi, noticed female subordination in Taiwanese sangha, such as the patriarchal arrangement mentioned earlier, and were of the opinion that since a patriarchal arrangement exists at almost every layer of the Buddhist community, a female-only sangha that runs independently of male control would be better for nuns to develop their potential. This is in sharp contrast to Rita Gross's opinion, which sees the female-only sangha depriving nuns of training equal to monks'. I do not wish to discuss this discrepancy any further in relation to Gross. The next section will be devoted to the discussion of which type of sangha is more beneficial to nuns.

Table 26 Taiwanese responses to the question: 'How do you find your life as a Buddhist nun?', by type of sangha

	<i>Female-only sangha</i>	<i>Mixed-sex sangha</i>
Harsh	9.7	6.3
Often difficult	15.7	17.0
Comfortable	25.0	32.5
Other	44.0	40.4
No answer	5.6	3.8
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	248	240

### *The influence of mixed-sex sangha*

In this section, I will draw on the data collected from my survey to show the influence of sex segregation or non-sex segregation on Buddhist nuns. Among the 492 Taiwanese questionnaire respondents, 248 are from the female-only sangha, 240 are from the mixed-sex sangha, and four supplied no answer or an 'other' answer (e.g. having lived at both types of sangha).

At first glance, as shown in Table 26, respondents of the mixed-sex sangha appear to be more likely than respondents of the female-only sangha to feel comfortable about their nunhood (32.5 percent vs. 25.0 percent). Yet, respondents of the mixed-sex sangha are also more likely than respondents of the female-only sangha to find their nunhood difficult (17.0 percent vs. 15.7 percent). Hence, the correlation between the types of sangha and the nuns' perception of their nunhood is not definite. There must be factors other than the types of sangha in play to determine a nun's welfare (e.g. education). Furthermore, the majority of nuns of the mixed-sex sangha do not feel that, at least in terms of material well-being, they are treated differently from monks of the same sangha (Table 27). I thought that the length of ordination might be a deciding factor, for perhaps out of respect for seniority, senior nuns would be treated better. But Table 27 illustrates that there is no correlation between the length of ordination and the treatment of nuns. From Tables 26 and 27, it may be safe to conclude that life as a nun at the mixed-sex sangha does not necessarily entail a disadvantaged life: only about 23.3 percent of nuns of the mixed-sex sangha find their lives harsh or difficult (Table 26), and the majority of them did not feel discriminated against at their sangha (Table 27). However, the findings in Tables 26 and 27 might in fact reflect that a nun who is more conscious of gender disparity is less likely to enter a mixed-sex sangha. Indeed, my Luminary nun informant told me that out of concern over the patriarchal arrangement that always occurs at occasions where monks and nuns are

Table 27 Taiwanese responses (mixed-sex sangha only) to the question: 'In terms of material well-being, do you agree that within the same sangha, monks and nuns are treated equally?'

<i>Length of ordination</i>	<i>&lt;3 years</i>	<i>4–10 years</i>	<i>11–20 years</i>	<i>&gt;21 years</i>	<i>No answer</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Disagree, monks are treated better	28.1	18.6	26.5	36.4		23.3
Agree, monks and nuns are treated the same	59.4	67.3	65.1	36.4	100.0	64.2
Other	3.1	12.4	6.0	18.2		9.2
No answer	9.4	1.7	2.4	9.0		3.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Total (no.)</i>	<i>32</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>240</i>

both present, their head nun, *bhikkhunī* Wu-Yin, insists that the Luminary sangha should remain as a female-only sangha. If nuns at female-only sangha are more conscious of gender disparity than nuns at mixed-sex sangha, it is likely that nuns at female-only sangha may also be more conscious of other forms of sex discrimination outside of their own sangha and thus are less content with their nunhood.

On the other hand, nuns at the mixed-sex sangha tend to be more conscious of gender disparity. First, although there is no statistical significance between nuns of the female-only sangha and the mixed-sex sangha on the question of female Buddhahood, respondents of the mixed-sex sangha are more likely than respondents of the female-only sangha to disagree with the idea of women's inferior karma (Table 28). My speculation is that nuns of the mixed-sex sangha have more contact with the opposite sex, so it is more necessary for them to prove and think positively about women's ability and potential, than it is for nuns of the female-only sangha. Having more contact with men also means having more opportunities to observe men's ability and potential, so nuns of the mixed-sex sangha would have more chance to compare the abilities and potential of the two sexes. One result might be that a nun comes to see the equal abilities and potential of the two sexes, and develops more confidence in herself.

The relevance of experience is also shown in a reply of a questionnaire respondent. A nun of the mixed-sex sangha answers the question of women's karma as follows:

The idea of women's inferior karma is based on a particular time and place. If one looks at the Buddhist community at different times and places, it would not be objective to say that women have less merit. In the contemporary Buddhist community, the

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Table 28 Gender-related concepts, Taiwanese respondents

Responses to the question: 'Do you agree that women were born women because they have less merit than men?'

	<i>Female-only sangha (%)</i>	<i>Mixed-sex sangha (%)</i>
Yes, I agree	41.1	39.1
No, I don't agree	37.5	48.3
I don't know/not sure	2.0	1.3
Other	16.5	9.6
No answer	2.9	1.7
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (No.)	248	240

Responses to the question: 'Do you agree that one can become a Buddha in a woman's body?'

Yes, I agree	72.2	76.7
No, I don't agree	10.0	8.8
I don't know/not sure	6.5	6.6
Other	6.5	4.6
No answer	4.8	3.3
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	248	240

majority of monastics are [nuns]. Even among the laity, there are more women than men engaging in Buddhist practice. Based on this reality, we know that to be born as women does not necessarily mean inferior karma.

(Age 21–30, ordained for 4–10 years)

Based on the observation of real life, she came to the conclusion that women do not necessarily have less merit than men. It shows the influence of experience. It thus seems reasonable to argue that living at a mixed-sex sangha, as TN9 argued in the earlier statement, could provide both monks and nuns with better opportunities to gain mutual understanding about the opposite sex. Another possibility for nuns at a mixed-sex sangha to be more confident of femaleness is that they may be able to have a female role model comparable to monks. That is, in a mixed-sex sangha, it is possible for a senior nun to rise to a position higher than most of the (younger) monks, even though she is not likely to become the abbess. Her high position nonetheless could make her a role model in the eyes of other young nuns, encouraging young nuns to believe that women have the same abilities as men. So they are less likely than nuns of the female-only sangha to think that women are less capable than men.



Table 29 Level of formal Buddhist education, Taiwanese respondents

	<i>Female-only sangha</i>	<i>Mixed-sex sangha</i>
Never received formal Buddhist education	32.7	22.5
Undergraduate Buddhist education and below*	46.4	58.3
Postgraduate Buddhist education	15.3	17.1
Other/no answer	5.6	2.1
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (No.)	248	240

\* Including those never finished Buddhist college or are currently an undergraduate students at Buddhist college

Table 30 Taiwanese responses to the question: 'In general, do you think that monks and nuns have equal access to affairs such as sangha management, preaching, and receiving Buddhist education?'

	<i>Female-only sangha</i>	<i>Mixed-sex sangha</i>
Yes, nuns and monks have equal access	60.0	76.7
No, nuns have less access	9.6	10.4
No, monks have less access	0.4	1.6
Other	26.0	6.7
No answer	4.0	4.6
Total (%)	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	248	240

More striking, however, are Tables 29 and 30. They show that among my survey samples, not only are nuns of the mixed-sex sangha more likely to receive formal Buddhist education than nuns of the female-only sangha, but also that they are more likely to find themselves having access to various affairs equal to monks. This finding seems to support Rita Gross's opinion that a mixed-sex sangha can ensure the same quality of training for nuns and monks (1993: 248).

However, I would suggest that the results of Tables 29 and 30 are related to human resource management within a sangha rather than the types of sangha. It seems unlikely that the Luminary Order, a female-only sangha with the self-reliance and independence of a *bhikkhuni* sangha as its goal, would neglect the rights and advancement of nuns. In other words, if a monk is willing to break away from the tradition by receiving female monastic disciples, it is possible that he is also open-minded enough to send his female disciples for formal Buddhist education, possibly at an institution

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*Table 31* Taiwanese responses to the question: ‘Regarding nuns’ rights in sangha, what changes would you like to see?’ (multiple-answers allowed)

	<i>Female-only sangha (no.)</i>	<i>Mixed-sex sangha (no.)</i>
I don’t think any change is necessary	36	52
Nuns should be given more access to preaching Dharma formally	99	80
Nuns should be given more opportunities to receive Buddhist education	105	103
Nuns should be allowed to hold higher positions in sangha management	55	62
Other	50	45
No answer	20	18
Total number of answers	365	360
Total number of respondents	248	240

outside of his own lineage, and to give both his female and male monastic disciples fairly equal access to various activities. Perhaps it is the way that human resource is managed within a sangha, rather than the type of sangha, that accounts for results of Tables 29 and 30. Furthermore, as argued earlier, Taiwanese Buddhists tend to prefer monks to nuns. It is then possible that a mixed-sex sangha, headed by a monk, may attract more lay support than a female-only sangha. Given that a mixed-sex sangha is more likely than a female-only sangha to be financially affluent, nuns at mixed-sex sangha may thus have more financial resources to pursue education.

Nevertheless, Table 31 indicates that only a minority of the nuns feel satisfied with the current situation of sangha management. Among my survey samples, only 14.5 percent of nuns of the female-only sangha and 21.7 percent of nuns of the mixed-sex sangha think that no further improvement is needed for nuns’ rights in the sangha. Buddhist education appears to be the most important concern for many nuns: about 42 percent of nuns at both types of sangha argue for the need to improve access to nuns’ education. Thus, although Buddhist education for nuns may seem generally accessible in Taiwan, there is a room for improvement. Additionally, a smaller proportion of nuns of the mixed-sex sangha feel the need to improve nuns’ access to formal Dharma preaching than nuns of the female-only sangha. This variation reveals that either nuns of the mixed-sex sangha are less interested in formal Dharma preaching, or they actually have more access to it than nuns of the female-only sangha. With regard to the nuns’ position in the sangha, the variation does not seem to be statistically significant, although it seems that nuns of the mixed-sex sangha are more contented with their current situation than nuns of the female-only sangha. Yet, one should bear in mind that only a small proportion of nuns feel

satisfied with their current situation. The majority of the nuns feel the need to improve nuns' rights, mostly in the areas of Buddhist education and formal Dharma preaching.

### *Summary*

This section has shown that although contemporary Taiwanese Buddhism is within the orbit of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism, in which sex segregation is the norm, the mixed-sex sangha continues to be a common feature. Furthermore, it is important to note that while it is non-controversial for Taiwanese *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* to live at the same premises, celibacy (and a vegetarian diet) is expected of them. Thus, some of my Sri Lankan informants' perception that all Mahāyāna monks and nuns engage in sexual activities is proved to be a misconception. What remains to be seen is whether the mixed-sex sangha can be accepted in other Buddhist traditions, particularly in Theravāda countries where the *bhikkhunī* transmission may come from Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha. Regardless of the fact that non-sex segregation at monasteries does not necessarily denote sexual sanction to the monastics, this is little known in Sri Lanka. Ignorance of these matters in Sri Lanka may seem unimportant, but it is in fact of enormous significance, for the refusal for the *bhikkhunī* transmission from the Mahāyāna tradition is still partly based on the accusation of clerical marriage in the Mahāyāna tradition.

As for the relation between the type of sangha and nuns' welfare, the survey shows that nuns of the mixed-sex sangha seem to enjoy better welfare than nuns of the female-only sangha, though it does not follow that nuns of the mixed-sex sangha may be elevated to the position of leadership. The survey findings may make it seem that the mixed-sex sangha advances nuns better than female-only sangha, but to what extent the Taiwanese model of mixed-sex sangha advances nuns requires further study.

### **The *bhikkhunī* ordination**

The absence of the *bhikkhunī* order in Theravāda countries has long gained the attention of Western feminists. Barnes writes, '[one] of the most important issues modern Buddhist women have raised is the matter of the restoration of the nuns' order ([*bhikkhunī* sangha] . . . in countries where it no longer exists, and its introduction where it never did find a home in the past' (1994: 138–139). Without the *bhikkhunī* ordination, a Buddhist nun can only reach the status of *sāmanerī* (female novice), *sikkhamāna* (trainee nun) or other non-Vinaya-based nunhood (e.g. the ten-precepts nuns in Sri Lanka), but never as a fully ordained *bhikkhunī*, occupying the same level of monastic status as *bhikkhu*. Since 'women's full participation, both in

the practice and interpretation of the tradition' (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 29) is seen as the primary feminist issue in Buddhism, the lack of the *bhikkhunī*-nunhood deprives women the right to be full participants in Buddhist monasticism. It has also been pointed out to me that it is only in countries where there is the *bhikkhunī* ordination (Taiwan, South Korea, etc.) that Buddhist nuns' orders are strong and prosperous. Any suggestion that the *bhikkhunī* ordination is irreverent to nuns' welfare is therefore, baseless.<sup>33</sup>

According to canonical texts, the birth of the *bhikkhunī* order did not come easily. Twice the Buddha refused the request from his aunt and stepmother, Mahāpajāptī, to admit women into sangha. Only at the third request did the Buddha finally agree. The *Cullavagga* records the third conversation between the Buddha and monk Ānanda, who had petitioned twice on behalf of Mahāpajāptī, as follows:

'Are women able, Lord, when they have entered into homelessness to realize the fruits of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and [arahantship]?' [Asked Ānanda].

'Yes, Ānanda, they are able' [answered the Buddha].

'If women then are able to realize perfection, and since Pajāpatī was of great service to you – she was your aunt, nurse, foster mother; when your mother died, she even suckled you at her own breast – it would be good if women could be allowed to enter into homelessness.'

'If then, Ānanda, Pajāpatī accepts the Eight Special Rules, let that be reckoned as her ordination.'

(quoted in Murcott 1991: 16)

The statement above is the common version of how the *bhikkhunī* sangha came into being, although according to Liz Willams (2000), arguing on the basis of literary records in which the Buddha mentions the fourfold Buddhist community (*bhikkhu*, *bhikkhunī*, laymen and laywomen) at the very beginning of his preaching career, it is possible that the *bhikkhunī* sangha existed before Mahāpajāpatī's ordination.

Nevertheless, it is the story above that is best known as the origin of the *bhikkhunī* sangha, and Mahāpajāpatī is generally regarded as the first *bhikkhunī*. According to this version, the Buddha was not only reluctant to admit women into the sangha, but even when he did, he laid down various constraints (e.g. the Eight Special Rules) upon the nuns. This apparent hostility towards female monastics posts a challenge to the claim of Buddhism as an egalitarian religion. Buddhist feminists have produced several theories to explain the apparently discriminating treatment for female and male monasticism. One theory is that the attitude attributed to the Buddha reflects a concern for the social and cultural contexts in ancient India, for in

ancient India, women's role is within the family, and allowing women into monasticism would create too much challenge to the existing social norm. In order not to diverge too greatly from the broader social and cultural expectations and to make the *bhikkhunī* sangha more acceptable to the laity, the Buddha exhibited reluctance towards female monasticism (Karma Lekshe Tosmo 1999a: 6). Another explanation is that the Buddha was 'waiting for the right moment' for the laity to be ready to support a new monastic order, and also that the Buddha was waiting for Ānanda to ask the right question in order to point out the positive spiritual potential of women (Wijayaratna 2001: 12–16). I have also heard another interesting theory at a ceremony in a *bhikkhunī* nunnery in Sri Lanka. The elderly Sri Lankan *bhikkhu* speaker praised the high value of the *bhikkhunī* ordination by pointing out that the Buddha rejected women's entry into sangha twice only for the purpose of showing the precious value of the *bhikkhunī* ordination.<sup>34</sup> All the theories above circumvent the conflict between the Buddha's statement and feminist position and are the interests of Buddhist feminists.

Whatever theory there might be, I should not dwell too much on this topic. It is the interest of this research to investigate whether, given the feminist focus on the *bhikkhunī* status, that the *bhikkhunī* status is actually beneficial to the nuns. Despite the feminist campaign for the establishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in countries where it is absent, previous research shows that not all Asian nuns welcome the establishment of the *bhikkhunī* order (e.g. Falk's research on Thai nuns, 2000a; Bartholomeusz's research on Sri Lankan nuns, 1994). Therefore, I will first draw on my Sri Lankan interview data to discuss the reasons for and against the *bhikkhunī* ordination. Since the *bhikkhunī* order has been firmly established in Taiwan since the mid-twentieth century, this section will focus mostly on the Sri Lankan findings.

### *Reasons for supporting or opposing the bhikkhunī ordination*

Similar to the absence of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka, Taiwan once lacked Buddhist higher ordination. As such, a great number of Taiwanese Buddhist women opted to become *zhaijiao* women, who observe the five basic Buddhist precepts rather than the *bhikkhunī* precepts. Since *zhaijiao* has become virtually unheard of among the younger generations of Taiwanese, it is safe to say that the *bhikkhunī* nunhood has replaced the *zhaijiao* nunhood as the mainstream monasticism for Taiwanese Buddhist women. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find records of whether *zhaijiao* women resisted the higher ordination, for most scholarly attention is paid to the efforts of installing Orthodox Chinese Buddhist monasticism in Taiwan (e.g. Jones 1999: 149–156). The opinions of *zhaijiao* women have been almost entirely ignored, including in this research. Regretfully, I did not include *zhaijiao* woman in my Taiwanese fieldwork, although one of my

Taiwanese interviewee nuns had been a *zhaijiao* woman. When I inquired, she simply replied,

We didn't know the difference. People just worshiped Guanyin. Then the Dharma masters from mainland China taught us the difference, so [three generations of the members of my sangha] all received higher ordination.

(TN11, in her 50s, ordained for more than 30 years)

TN11 went on to speak of some of the changes carried out by the then head monk after their higher ordination (e.g. moving male disciples to another temple). It seems that TN11 had internalized the 'righteousness' of higher ordination and did not question the necessity of it. Such an opinion is common among Taiwanese monastics (e.g. see Shi Jianye 1999: 17–34), and the resistance against higher ordination, if there was any, is seldom vocalized and thus less known. In contrast, the opposition to the *bhikkhunī* ordination was clear, for it could still be found in Sri Lanka at the time of my fieldwork.

It is sometimes assumed that younger nuns are more open to new ideas and thus are more receptive to changes such as the *bhikkhunī* movement than older nuns but the survey reveals that, at least among my Sri Lankan survey samples, there is no definite correlation between age and a nun's status. It shows that nuns aged 51–60 are most likely to receive the *bhikkhunī* ordination. Since the *bhikkhunī* movement is a concurrent social movement and still faces a great deal of resistance, the finding probably indicates that nuns aged 51–60 are most likely to have the social resources and physical strength to engage in the social movement, when younger nuns do not have the social resources to challenge the existing status quo and older nuns do not have the physical strength to engage in the social movement. Indeed, one elderly ten-precept nun (SN10<sup>35</sup>), who had a *bhikkhunī* disciple, attributed her reason for not receiving the *bhikkhunī* ordination as her being 'too old'. Another interpretation is that the 51–60-year-old group are the generation who grew up immediately after Independence and are more likely than younger generations to be nationalistic. Since, as to be shown later, the *bhikkhunī* sangha might be argued as an important part of Sinhala inheritance, the nationalistic, 51–60-years-old group are thus more likely than any other age group to seek higher ordination.

I have mentioned several reasons for the opposition to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in previous sections. They range from the elderly ten-precept nuns' practical concern of being neglected by their *bhikkhunī* disciples to the misconception of non-celibacy among *all* Mahāyāna monastics. Here, I will mention some of the reasons that have not yet been discussed.

First, it is important to note that opinions toward the *bhikkhunī* ordination among Sri Lankan nuns were very diverse. Their reasons for supporting or rejecting the *bhikkhunī* ordination might even contradict one another. For example, while some ten-precept nuns rejected the *bhikkhunī* ordination on the grounds that *bhikkhunī* would spend most of their time in meditation without providing social services to the community (e.g. SN4<sup>36</sup>), some *bhikkhunī* stated that becoming *bhikkhunī* was important because *bhikkhunī* had the responsibility of performing social service (e.g. SN9<sup>37</sup>). And while some ten-precept nuns rejected the *bhikkhunī* ordination on the grounds that it was impossible to observe all the 311 *bhikkhunī* precepts (e.g. SN16<sup>38</sup>), some *bhikkhunī* saw the 311 *bhikkhunī* precepts as the reason for receiving the higher ordination because, they argued, the 311 *bhikkhunī* precepts bring one closer to nirvāna (e.g. SN20<sup>39</sup>). The diversity of opinions reveals the need to avoid generalization, and not to perceive the nuns as a faceless, static whole. But perhaps more significant is that, regardless of my interviewee nuns' monastic status and their opinions toward the *bhikkhunī* status, they shared in a generalized argument, seeking to advocate or expressing reservation about the same issues. This probably indicates not only the expectations that Sri Lankan society places upon Buddhist nuns but also the likelihood that these expectations may not necessarily alter on the basis of a nun's monastic status.

However, much as the opinions might vary among Sri Lankan nuns, most of them noticed the lack of support for the *bhikkhunī* order from the government and from some monks. Some ten-precept nuns told me that among the reasons for their opposition to the *bhikkhunī* ordination was the lack of permission from the high priests of their lineage and the lack of governmental support for the *bhikkhunī* order (e.g. SN1<sup>40</sup>). Although it is possible that some nuns internalized the importance of hierarchy and thus felt compelled to object to the *bhikkhunī* ordination in the absence of hierarchal support, objection to the *bhikkhunī* ordination may also arise from other considerations. Lineage loyalty is one possibility: such is the case of nuns at Sri Sanghamittā Educational Center, who, despite their wishes to become *bhikkhunī*, insisted on not receiving the higher ordination from outside of their original lineage. Practical concern is another: the lack of governmental recognition of the *bhikkhunī* status might mean the lack of access to various state-sponsored benefits (e.g. education), and the lack of support from senior *bhikkhu* might mean less acceptance and provision from the laity.

*Bhikkhunī* themselves were very much aware of the lack of hierarchal support, too. One *bhikkhunī* said:

As a *bhikkhunī*, I can go to a monk's temple. They ask why you became a *bhikkhunī*, why you got higher ordination. Other than that, they receive us. Every temple [would receive us]. The *bhikkhunī*



order is different, because they think it should be given by Buddha himself. Some are holding to these old ideas. Buddha gave the same status to women. The *bhikkhuni* order was destroyed completely because we had a foreign invasion. *Bhikkhuni* were not helped. . . . If the government helps us, monks will accept us. It's not the monks' responsibility but the government's. Now there is no more king, so the ruler is the government, which the people elect and give power to. But still, they overlook the *bhikkhuni* order. But I think as time goes on, they will understand. Now we are getting training. *Bhikkhuni* are much helped by foreign people. We can do much work to benefit people and our country, and also foreign countries. We can also go to foreign countries and give them our knowledge. We can do a lot of service. The only thing is that the government doesn't help. It's the fault of the government, not the fault of the monks, not the fault of the lay people. I don't blame the monks. It's the government. It's a Buddhist country and the government consists of 70 or 80 percent of Buddhists. But politics is a different game, isn't it?

(SN12, in English, age 52, ordained for 6 years)

SN12's statement reveals that although monks may object to the *bhikkhuni* ordination, they seldom show their objection directly to a *bhikkhuni*'s face (e.g. preventing *bhikkhuni* from entering their temples). Accordingly, the lack of support from the monks and the government did not necessarily mean absolute suppression of the *bhikkhuni* order, for there exists space for *bhikkhuni* to pursue their own interests (e.g. attending monks' sermons). The fact that SN12 mentioned foreign aid is also worth noticing, for it indicates the significant foreign influence on the issue of the *bhikkhuni* order in Sri Lanka. Sakyadhita is known for attempting to restore the *bhikkhuni* order in Sri Lanka (see Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a), so is the Taiwanese sangha, Foguagnshan. Far from being a passive recipient of foreign aid, however, SN12 perceived herself as an active agent in a teacher–student relationship with foreign donors. She argued that Sri Lankan *bhikkhuni* 'can also go to foreign countries and give them our knowledge', and thus become the benefactors to foreign donors. This reflects the Buddhist view of *dāna* (donation), which implies an exchange between the laity receiving the precious teaching of Dharma from the monastics and supporting those on the path to nirvāna (the monastics). On these grounds, the laity who offer support to the nuns benefit more from the exchange, for they accumulate merit by supporting the worthy sangha. Also significant is the responsibility she placed on the government. Her mention of governmental responsibility for the protection of Buddhism perhaps reflects the *cakkavatti* idea in Theravāda Buddhism. That is, an ideal king is a *cakkavatti*, who is virtuous and a protector of Dharma (Swearer 1987: 112–114). Since Sri Lanka no longer has a monarchy, SN12, and probably a large number



of Sinhala Buddhists, see it as the responsibility of the government to play the role of *cakkavatti*. Indeed, some scholars have commented on the relationship between the *cakkavatti* idea and the political discourse in contemporary Sri Lanka (e.g. Bartholomeusz 2002). This indicates the effect of political elements in a religious movement such as the *bhikkhunī* movement.

As for the difference in the status between the *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns, most *bhikkhunī* were confident that the laity knew the difference. However, in my observation, most of the laity was unaware of the difference (at least, at the time of my fieldwork in 2002). Personally, I found it difficult to distinguish a *bhikkhunī* from a ten-precept nun at first glance, for both *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns wear an ochre- or brown-colored robe and blouse. The only difference in their appearances is in the outer robe: a *bhikkhunī* outer robe, like that of *bhikkhu*, has four threads on its edge, symbolizing ‘merit field’, while a ten-precept nun’s outer robe has none. Because the four ‘merit field’ threads are thin and not entirely visible, I always needed to look very attentively to see whether a nun had them on her robe. Probably because *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns do not perceptibly stand out from each other, the laity who had never been told about *bhikkhunī* may not even notice the difference in the appearance between the *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns.

On the other hand, the nuns themselves were clearly aware of the difference between *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns. One ten-precept nun told me:

Society usually treats us well, but I have problems with monks. I can’t tell you what, but sometimes I feel that monks don’t treat the ten-precept nuns well. I don’t think that even if I were to become a *bhikkhunī*, the monk and the laity would treat me any better. . . . *Bhikkhunī* are not angry with the ten-precept nuns, but they don’t socialize with the ten-precept nuns neither. *Bhikkhunī* think that they are higher than the ten-precept nuns. Yes, I also think that the *bhikkhunī* are higher than the ten-precept nuns. . . . There are services the *bhikkhunī* can do but the ten-precept nuns can’t. But I can’t see what the *bhikkhunī* are doing for society!

(SN15, in Sinhala, age 46, ordained for 22 years)

SN15 seemed to feel discriminated against by both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*. As much as she was aware that within the monastic hierarchy, a *bhikkhunī* supposedly held a higher status than a ten-precept nun and there were rituals only *bhikkhunī* or *bhikkhu* could perform, she did not see how the *bhikkhunī* status might improve the monks’ treatment towards nuns, and how the *bhikkhunī* ordination might benefit society.

The marginalization of the ten-precept nuns by the *bhikkhunī* ordination could also be observed in some other incidents. For example, one Buddhist ritual that is common in Sri Lanka is *pirit*, in which, according to Lynn De Silva (1974: 111–121) and Walpola Rahula (1956: 278–280), *bhikkhu*, without mentioning nuns, are invited by the laity to chant sutras for the purpose of exorcizing evil spirits or giving blessings. Although the laity may also chant *pirit*, and Bartholomeusz reports witnessing a *pirit* conducted by the ten-precept nuns (1994: 139–141), many of my interviewee *bhikkhunī* insisted that only *bhikkhunī* could perform *pirit*. One *bhikkhunī* told me:

The laity invited me to conduct this overnight *pirit* because I am a *bhikkhunī*. . . . Although monks and nuns may conduct a *pirit* together, sometimes a *pirit* is performed by nuns only. But only *bhikkhunī*. The ten-precept nuns are not allowed to do *pirit*. People can tell the difference between the *bhikkhunī* and the ten-precept nuns.

(SN3, in Sinhala, ordained for 35 years)

It is possible that a new religious hierarchy was being created, in the way that the *bhikkhunī* insisted that *pirit* could only be performed by monastics with the higher ordination. If it is actually the case, it seems unfortunate that the feminist act of reestablishing the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka should result in the marginalization of the ten-precept nuns. On the other hand, it is also important to remember that because many *bhikkhunī* of contemporary Sri Lanka are from an urban background and/or were ordained at an older age, not all *bhikkhunī* had been trained in rituals and were capable of performing them. Only *bhikkhunī* who were ordained as ten-precept nuns at a young age and received the *bhikkhunī* ordination later in life may have been trained in the traditional rituals and know how to perform them.

Saying that the *bhikkhunī* ordination may marginalize the ten-precept nuns, is not to deny the empowerment that the *bhikkhunī* ordination can bring. For example, the higher ordination enables the nuns to claim comparable status with *bhikkhu*. One *bhikkhunī* said,

I have always believed that becoming a *bhikkhunī* is important. One reason is for your own redemption. But becoming a *bhikkhunī* also enables me to help society more. When you are a ten-precept nun, you are just like an ordinary lay person. But when you don the [*bhikkhunī*] robe, you have status, and people respect you better. You are no longer the person who observes the mere ten precepts. Because of the special robe, people know the difference between ten-precept nuns and *bhikkhunī*. Previously, a nun's robe was an

ordinary garment with trousers. But the *bhikkhunī* wear the same as the *bhikkhu*. And we can do the same works as the *bhikkhu*. So, we are formal monastic members. The people around here and monks around here have not shown any ill-feeling toward our becoming *bhikkhunī*. They have accepted it. It's a rural village. Villagers are more tolerant than city folks: they help each other and everything. So it's easier for them to accept changes.

(SN9, in Sinhala, age 32, ordained for 20 years)

Accordingly, the *bhikkhunī* ordination enabled SN9 to perceive herself as having the same level of status as the *bhikkhu*, apparently giving her a sense of equality and empowerment. In terms of material well-being, the *bhikkhunī* ordination may provide a positive impact, too, as SN9 went on to say:

People think that you gain more merit if you give alms to someone who is spiritually advanced. . . . Traditionally, there are rituals that only the *bhikkhu* could perform, and people gave them better alms for performing these rituals. But the alms go to the whole sangha and not to individual monks. Now there are *bhikkhunī*. *Bhikkhunī* are entitled to receive the same alms as *bhikkhu*. The ten-precept nuns cannot conduct these rituals.

(SN9, in Sinhala, age 32, ordained for 20 years)

The *bhikkhunī* status enabled SN9 to perceive herself as being entitled to the same alms as *bhikkhu*. This is consistent with Kawanami's (2000) finding with Burmese eight-precept nuns, which shows that due to their ambiguous monastic status, Burmese eight-precept nuns sometimes internalize their 'unworthiness' of receiving lay donation. Additionally, because the sangha is considered as a 'merit-field', worthy for the laity to 'sow seeds of merit' (Rahula 1956: 259), a monastic without the higher ordination may not be considered as the best merit-field for the laity to 'invest' her/his donation in (Bartholomeusz 1994: 139) and subsequently receives less support from the laity. In other words, the *bhikkhunī* ordination that gives a nun formal sangha status could be an act of empowerment by giving nuns the monastic status to receive lay donation, and by stressing the equal rights of *bhikkhunī* and *bhikkhu*. Table 32 shows that generally speaking, *bhikkhunī* felt better treated by the laity than non-*bhikkhunī* nuns. This might be a result of the formal sangha status claimed by *bhikkhunī* that grants them the position as 'merit field'. Table 33 also shows that *bhikkhunī* are more likely than non-*bhikkhunī* nuns to think positively about women's karma, though the difference is not significant.

Finally, Karma Lekshe Tsomo suggests one underlying reason for the opposition to the *bhikkhunī* ordination: monks' reluctance to share power

# RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Table 32 Sri Lankan responses to the question: ‘Do you agree that the laity treats the nuns and monks equally?’

	<i>Non-bhikkhunī nuns*</i>	<i>Bhikkhunī</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Yes, I agree that the laity treats monks and nuns equally	16.3	46.3	0.0
No, I think that the laity treats the monks better	58.1	32.2	100.0
No, I think that the laity treats the nuns better	2.4	3.7	0.0
Other	11.6	10.4	0.0
No answer	11.6	7.2	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	43	28	3

\* Including ten-precept nuns, *sāmanerī*, and *sikkhamāna*.

Table 33 Sri Lankan responses to the question: ‘Do you agree that women are born women because they have less merit than men?’

	<i>Non-bhikkhunī nuns*</i>	<i>Bhikkhunī</i>	<i>No answer</i>
Yes, I agree	23.2	14.2	33.3
No, I don’t agree	51.2	53.6	33.3
I don’t know	11.6	17.9	33.3
Other	14.0	10.7	0.0
No answer	0.0	3.6	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (no.)	43	28	3

\* Including ten-precept nuns, *sāmanerī*, and *sikkhamāna*.

and financial support (1999a: 28), a speculation based on the psychological motive of the dominant group being unwilling to grant another group equal rights because of the anticipation, regardless of whether it is reasonable or not, of losing power and privilege. This is a speculation commonly attributed to any dominant group for being reluctant to share equal rights with others, and in this case, the dominant group is the *bhikkhu* order. Such concerns, as we have seen in the Taiwanese case, are redundant, for in spite of the numerical dominance of the nuns and the firm establishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Taiwan, monks, rather than nuns, remain leaders of nearly all Taiwanese Buddhist organizations. The smaller size of the monks’ order even causes some nuns to intentionally give privileges to monks. Hence, worries that the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī*

order in Sri Lanka might somehow damage the well-being of the *bhikkhu* order could be diminished if the model of Taiwanese sangha were familiar to those who opposed it.

*The Mahāyāna issue in the bhikkhunī transmission*

One reason that nearly all of my Sri Lankan informants mentioned for their opposition to the *bhikkhunī* ordination is related to the antagonism among different traditions. It is consistent with earlier findings that some Sri Lankans consider the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order a threat to the integrity of Theravāda tradition (e.g. Bartholomeusz 1994). This concern arises from the requirement to have both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* preceptors in the *bhikkhunī* ordination (for details, see Wijayaratna 2001: 30–46), and the fact that until the revival of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka in recent years (e.g. the Dambulla *bhikkhunī* order in Chapter 2), the *bhikkhunī* order could only be found in Mahāyāna traditions of East Asia. The need to invite *bhikkhunī* preceptors from Mahāyāna tradition for a *bhikkhunī* ordination presents a challenge to Theravāda integrity.

It is, however, important to point out that the use of the term ‘Mahāyāna tradition’ in this book is merely for the purpose of reflecting the perception of Sri Lankan Buddhists, who, as will be shown later, generally are not well-informed about Mahāyāna Buddhism. In reality, the term ‘Mahāyāna tradition’ is meaningless because of the wide diversity in the doctrines and practices of traditions that are considered ‘Mahāyāna’. For example, not only are Tibetan Buddhist traditions greatly different from Chinese Buddhist traditions, but also among different Tibetan/Chinese Buddhist schools themselves, the practices and doctrines diverge extensively. Since most of my Sri Lankan informants spoke of ‘Mahāyāna’ as if it were one unified tradition and did not distinguish one school from another, I continue to use the generalized term ‘Mahāyāna’.

Wijayaratna points out the ‘Theravāda vs. Mahāyāna’ issue faced by the *bhikkhunī* movement in Sri Lanka:

However, in any case no Buddhist lady from Ceylon or Thailand is forbidden to obtain Higher Ordination from the nuns of Taiwan or Hong Kong or South Korea. There is no excommunication in Buddhism. There is no hostility between different schools. Under these conditions, if some [ten-precept nuns] obtained Higher Ordination from a Buddhist school in Taiwan or Hong Kong, these new nuns would belong to the school in which they were ordained. If there were many in their group, some day they would be able to re-establish the [*bhikkhunī* sangha] in Sri Lanka and in Thailand. But inevitably, they would have to face some questions: Would they observe the [Eight Special Rules] that were initially imposed

on nuns? Would they respect the rules of the Pāli *Pātimokkha* in all its details? Or would they respect a *Pātimokkha* different from the Pāli tradition? As to their monastic clothes, would they be like those of ancient Theravāda nuns, or those nuns in Taiwan, Hong Kong or Japan? Would monks from Taiwan or Hong Kong arrive to help these new nuns? What would be the attitude of the monks in Sri Lanka or in Thailand towards this new generation of nuns who would be outside the Theravāda tradition? etc., etc.

(2001: 150)

While data gathered in my fieldwork is insufficient to address all the questions mentioned above, it is important to note that, in contrast to Wijayaratna's suggestion, none of my Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* informants considered themselves as Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* and none of them wore the robes of Chinese or Korean traditions. In fact, none of the nuns who received the *bhikkhunī* ordination at the 1996 Sarnath ordination, organized by a South Korean sangha, and the 1998 Bodhgaya ordination, organized by a Taiwanese sangha, perceived their ordination as 'Mahāyāna'. They insisted that the Sarnath and Bodhgaya ordinations were 'international' ordinations rather than Mahāyāna ordinations, since Theravāda sentiment was taken into consideration at those ordinations (Li 2000b: 171–172; Salgado 2000b: 39). However, some Sri Lankans did not judge these efforts being 'Theravāda' enough to verify the two ordinations as being in accordance with Theravāda identity. The determination to preserve Theravāda tradition is so strong that some of my *bhikkhunī* informants insisted on not recognizing those *bhikkhunī* who were ordained in 'Mahāyāna tradition' (i.e. the 1996 Sarnath and 1998 Bodhgaya International Ordination) as *bhikkhunī*. That includes *bhikkhunī* associated with the Sakyadhita Center such as *bhikkhunī* Kusuma, who was considered by some as being ordained in Mahāyāna tradition (e.g. SN5<sup>41</sup>). Yet, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma perceives her higher ordination as 'international' rather than Mahāyāna.

It is possible to argue that the concern over the Theravāda and Mahāyāna distinction on the basis of the Vinaya is redundant. For historically, the Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna distinction was not made on the basis of the Vinaya at all, but if anything, on the basis of doctrine, scriptural authority or perhaps practices (see Williams 1989: 1–33). It is also speculated that Buddhist monastic rules were initially developed to regulate the increasingly institutionalized renunciants and the ever-enlarging settled monasticism. As Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna adherents lived together during the early period, the monastic rules they developed and observed are essentially the same (Ray 1994: 397–417).

As for the issue of which school of *bhikkhunī* precepts to observe, this is an issue noticed by Sakaydhita activists from fairly early on. The *Bhikkhunī Pātimokkha* of Theravāda tradition contains 311 precepts for *bhikkhunī*.

*Bhikkhunī* of Chinese (and Korean) tradition observe the *Dharmagupta Vinaya*, which contains 348 precepts for *bhikkhunī*. Sakyadhita activists generally argue that the *Dharmagupta* is in fact a subset of the Theravāda school and the Vinaya rules of all schools are fundamentally the same, so therefore, those who received the *bhikkhunī* ordination from *bhikkhunī* of Chinese or Korean tradition are still able to claim Theravāda identity (Kabilsingh 1988: 228; Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1988: 243–244).<sup>42</sup> This is in addition to the fact that Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī*, regardless of from whom they received their higher ordination, are adamant about observing the Theravāda (Pāli) Vinaya.

Another aspect often mentioned by my Sri Lankan informants regarding the Theravāda and Mahāyāna distinction concerns the monastic robes. Some of my Sri Lankan informants told me that those who had received the higher ordination in Mahāyāna tradition (in their perception) all eventually converted back to Theravāda Buddhism, because those nuns all put on Theravāda robes upon their return to Sri Lanka. *Bhikkhunī* Kusuma also writes that: ‘We [who received higher ordination in Sarnath in 1996] do not follow the Mahāyāna, but follow the Theravāda way of wearing the ancient robe’ (2004: 7). Apparently, Sri Lankan Buddhists consider the monastic robes a significant symbol of Theravāda integrity.

Technically speaking, Buddhist monastic robes must follow a certain style, for the Vinaya give detailed descriptions regarding the monks and nuns’ robes:

According to the *Mahāvagga*, the monk’s costume comprised three pieces, or rather three robes: one with a lining, to be worn as an outer cloak if need be, and called *sanghāti*, one without a lining, called *uttarāsanga*, worn as a toga, and one used as underclothing, the *antarāvāsaka*. . . Nuns also wore three robes similar to the monks’, with two extra pieces: a vest called *samakaccikā*, and a bathing garment called *udakasātikā*. . . According to the *Vinaya* texts and some stories from the *Nikāyas*, the color of ascetics’ clothes was usually ochre or yellow. Therefore, the rag-robes worn in the first years of [sangha] must have been that color; but there is no rule which lays down the correct color for robes in general. Some rules, however, do specify which colors are unsuitable. The *Mahāvagga* . . . tells of some monks who tried, in the first days of the [sangha], to wear blue, brown, yellowish brown, pale yellow, dark yellow, crimson or even black robes. As lay followers criticized these colors, the [Buddha] forbade monks and nuns to wear them. They were not allowed to wear white either.

(Wijayaratna 1990: 36–37)

But, due to cultural and climate differences, Chinese Buddhists have developed a different attitude towards the monastic robes, and the style of



Chinese Buddhist monastic robes has diverged from that prescribed in the Vinaya (see Wu-Yin 2001: 249–265). This, especially the wearing of black robes in some Chinese Buddhist sangha, contradicts that of Theravāda. Taiwanese Buddhists generally are not adamant (or informed) about the significance of the style of monastic robes. I, too, was initially unable to comprehend my Sri Lankan informants' emphasis on the monastic robes, for coming from a Taiwanese Buddhist background, the monastic robes did not imply the same symbolism to me as to my Sri Lankan informants.

On the other hand, the concern over the monastic robes is paramount in Theravāda tradition. Historically, Theravāda Buddhism developed many different ways of wearing monastic robes. These differences in the robes are one of the key ways of distinguishing between various Theravāda sects. That is, even if there is a difference in wearing the monastic robes in Sri Lanka, the difference is likely to be subtle, for whenever Theravāda reforms taken place, the reformers sought to restore the monastic robes to those described in the Pāli canon. More importantly perhaps is that Sri Lankan chronicles record heretics as wearers of black or blue robes. Therefore, correct monastic robes are closely associated with Theravāda purity, especially in Sri Lanka.<sup>43</sup>

Having discussed two issues about the Theravāda and Mahāyāna distinction, I will now move on to the discussion regarding the concerns over Mahāyāna influence in Sri Lanka.

#### *The lack of cross-tradition communication*

The lack of cross-tradition communication appears to be a significant obstacle to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka.

Most of my Sri Lankan informants admitted that they did not know much about Mahāyāna Buddhism and were unaware that the *bhikkhunī* ordination in the Chinese tradition originally came from Sri Lanka, which is a historical incident seen by some (e.g. H. Goonatilake 2001) as a legitimate reason to receive the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Chinese Buddhism. However, many of those who knew about the Sri Lankan origin of the Chinese *bhikkhunī* order (or were later informed by me) still insisted that the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Chinese Buddhism was illegitimate on the grounds that it was Mahāyāna tradition. One basis for rejecting Chinese *bhikkhunī* transmission was the concern about the authenticity of Mahāyāna Buddhism, as one ten-precept nun stated:

Mahāyāna Buddhism is not the real Buddhism. It was forged! After Lord Buddha preached Dharma, there was a disagreement and some people became astray from Dharma. These astray monks despised *arahants* and think that becoming Buddha is the only way.



That's why they made up Mahāyānaism. . . . Theravāda nuns went to other countries to give *bhikkhunī* ordination, first in Sri Lanka. . . . Yes, I know that *bhikkhunī* ordination in Mahāyāna tradition originally came from Sri Lanka.

(SN16, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 19 years)

The belief that Mahāyāna Buddhism was not the authentic Buddhism led SN16 to resist the *bhikkhunī* ordination, despite the fact that she was very much aware of the historical and lineage link between the Chinese *bhikkhunī* order and the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* order.

Other reasons cited by my Sri Lankan informants for their aversion to Mahāyāna Buddhism ranged from the belief that Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages everyone to go to Pure Land rather than nirvāna (e.g. SN20<sup>44</sup>), to the belief that Theravāda Buddhism is superior to Mahāyāna Buddhism (e.g. SN25<sup>45</sup>), the belief that Mahāyāna Buddhists do not practice meditation (e.g. SN1<sup>46</sup>), and the belief that Mahāyāna monastics do not observe precepts strictly (e.g. SN19<sup>47</sup>). Taiwanese Buddhists might admit the last accusation, because Buddhist monastic disciplines have undergone many changes since Buddhism first arrived in China and they may not be the same as those prescribed in the Vinaya. But all other accusations are either misperceptions or generalizations. For example, as much as the belief in Pure Land is popular among Mahāyāna adherents, it is merely one sect of practices in a very diverse tradition. And the accusation of non-meditation practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism is simply a misperception.

Overall, the apparent aversion to Mahāyāna Buddhism might be attributed to the lack of communication among the adherents of different Buddhist traditions. An English-speaking laywoman whom I met at a *bhikkhunī* nunnery exclaimed to me:

People think that people from America, Taiwan, Korea, Burma, all these Mahāyāna countries want to come to destroy our Theravāda Buddhism. . . . Monks and nuns in Mahāyāna countries live together. That's why we don't like Mahāyāna Buddhism. . . . Many monks in the Colombo area are Mahāyānists, and we don't like them.<sup>48</sup>

The fact that Burma (Myanmar) is of the Theravāda tradition and America is far from being a Buddhist country reveals the lack of knowledge about other Buddhist traditions among some Sri Lankan Buddhists. When I pointed out that clerical marriage is permitted only in the Japanese tradition and some Tibetan schools, she looked skeptical. Even though she had previously worked overseas (in the Middle East) and had visited another Buddhist country (Thailand), her overseas experience did not seem to improve her knowledge about other Buddhist traditions. Having said this, it is important to point out that ignorance about other Buddhist traditions was not only

found among Sri Lankan Buddhists but could also be found among Buddhists elsewhere. For example, some of my Taiwanese interviewee nuns perceived nuns in the Theravāda tradition as powerless, bounded by conservative practices, and attributed the prosperity of the *bhikkhunī* order in Taiwan to the open-mindedness of Mahāyāna Buddhism (e.g. TN2<sup>49</sup>). One of my initial motives for conducting this research is the gap I found between Western feminist discourse on Buddhism and the actual life of Asian Buddhist women. Thus, although ignorance might be one of the significant factors for Sri Lankan aversion to the Mahāyāna tradition, Buddhists elsewhere also have their ignorance and misunderstandings about Buddhism and Buddhists in Sri Lanka.

The importance of communication is exemplified in the attitude of a Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* who had visited Taiwan:

Mahāyāna expects everyone to be a Buddha, unlike ours that reaches nirvāna through three stages. In Mahāyāna way, they can serve the community better. Arahant cannot help people in their redemption. They don't like us to get higher ordination from Mahāyāna tradition. That's the idea that prevails here. We can take the good things from Mahāyāna system. I learned about Mahāyāna Buddhism when I was in Taiwan. Some people believe that Mahāyāna monastics do not practice celibacy, but I didn't see that in Taiwan. Most people know only that factor and form a prejudice.

(SN26, in Sinhala, age 38, ordained for 20 years)

SN26's case shows how ignorance might be overcome by better communication, for based on her observation of Taiwanese Buddhists, she was able to refute some of the misperceptions about Mahāyāna Buddhism commonly believed in Sri Lanka.

Apart from the lack of cross-tradition communication, there are other reasons that might be attributed to Sri Lankan nuns' insistence on maintaining Theravāda tradition. The next section will show how various factors might contribute to the resistance against Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* transmission.

### *Pride in Theravāda tradition*

The pride and determination to preserve the Theravāda form of Buddhism emerges as one of the significant reasons for some Sri Lankans' reluctance to invite Mahāyāna preceptors for the *bhikkhunī* transmission.

Namely, the resistance against Mahāyāna influence may not simply be the competition among different traditions but goes beyond it, to an identification of Sri Lankan/Sinhala pride with Theravāda Buddhism. It is illustrated in one *bhikkhunī*'s statement,

Our country is Theravāda Buddhist country. Therefore, we can't do Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* in our country because our people traditionally have Theravāda. Our idea is also Theravāda. Our parents, grandparents are also Theravāda. Therefore, we are Theravāda. That's why. We can't say Mahāyāna is not good. But according to our custom, we are Theravāda. That's why we can't do another.

(SN8, in English, age 58, ordained for 48 years)

SN8's statement indicates that she identified Theravāda identity with Sri Lanka, for she seemed to associate Theravāda tradition with Sri Lankan/Sinhala heritage.

The identification of Sinhala heritage with Theravāda Buddhism might be found in various myths that prevail in Sri Lanka. For instance, the Sinhala chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*, which was probably written or assembled in the fifth century (for the first part) and the thirteenth century (for the second part), records that when the Buddha was about to enter *parinirāvana*, he said to Sakka, king of gods,

Vijaya, son of King Sihabāhu, is come to Lanka, from the country of Lāla, together with seven hundred followers. In Lanka, O lord of gods, will my religion be established, therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka.

(*Mahāvamsa*, VII; translated by Geiger 1912: 55)

The island of Lanka is said to have no human being living there at that time, and Vijaya and his followers became the ancestors of the Sinhala nation. The *Mahāvamsa* also tells that the Buddha himself visited the island of Lanka three times and left his footprint at Samantakūta mountain<sup>50</sup> (Rahula 1956: 41). Another record in the *Mahāvamsa* (XXXIII) says that Buddhist scriptures, the *Tripitaka*, were originally written down in Sri Lanka rather than in India. The Sinhala's pride in Theravāda Buddhism is thus understandable. Not only was the Sinhala nation 'chosen' by the Buddha to be the protector of Dharma and the Buddha himself visited the island three times, but also Buddhist scriptures were first written down in Sri Lanka. Understandably, the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Mahāyāna traditions might be seen as an intrusion, if not an insult, to the heritage of the Sinhala nation, since the three myths above place Theravāda Buddhism as the backbone of the Sinhala nation. Also significant here is that the *Mahāvamsa* tells the story of the oppression brought upon the orthodox Mahāvihāra monks, identified by Rahula as Theravāda monks, by an evil heretical monk, Sanghamittā (XXXVII),<sup>51</sup> identified by Rahula as a Mahāyāna monk (1956, 93–94). The orthodox Buddhism was restored upon the Sinhala king's repentance. Thus, it is possible to read the *Mahāvamsa* as preaching the

association between the Sinhala nation and Theravāda Buddhism, as well as urging the importance of upholding the right sangha (that is, Theravāda Buddhism).

However, rather than bluntly accusing the *Mahāvamsa* as the main cause for the association between Sinhala nationalism and Theravada Buddhism, as some might argue (e.g. Bartholomeusz 2002), it is perhaps important to note that the notion of the *Mahāvamsa* being a historical record was developed under the influence of European Orientalists during the nineteenth century (Rogers 1990). Although some scholars see the *Mahāvamsa* and other Sinhala *vamsas* (e.g. the *Dīpavamsa*) as strong literary evidence of the historical identification of the Sinhala people and Buddhism (e.g. Dharmadasa 1992: 5–26), on the basis of inscription and literary sources, R.A.L.H. Gunawardana (1990) questions the application of the Sinhala identity in the *Mahāvamsa*. He argues that while in the Vijaya myth, the Sinhala refers merely to the ruling family, the term ‘Sinhala’ was later extended to include all inhabitants of the island. It was only during the anti-colonial struggle in pre-Independence Sri Lanka, that the identity of Sinhala being a separate ethnic-linguistic group was formulated:

If in earlier historical epochs the Buddhist identity reflected a cosmopolitan outlook and extended beyond political boundaries to include coreligionists in different kingdoms, in the twentieth century a new term, ‘Sinhala-Buddhist’, comes into use to denote a group of people who are distinguished from the Sinhala of the other faiths and also from the Buddhists of other ethnic groups. Anagarika Dharmapala was probably the first person to use the term. . . . The portrayal of ‘the Sinhalese Buddhists’ as an underprivileged group had a certain basis in fact in that, under British rule, governmental patronage had favoured Christians, particularly those converted to the Anglican faith. . . . In the context of the socio-economic transformations taking place under colonial rule, the Sinhala consciousness found it possible to overcome some of the limitations which had prevented its development and expansion in its previous historical forms. Though the Sinhala identity had been ‘extended’ earlier to cover ‘the inhabitants of the island’, it was during the post-nineteenth century period that it entered the consciousness of the masses, drawing together that section of the population which belonged to the Sinhala linguistic group through a consciousness overarching their local, regional and caste identities (Gunawardana 1990: 76).

Berkwitz further cautions us against the way we might read Buddhist historiography such as the *Mahāvamsa* and other Sinhala *vamsa*, for Buddhist historiography may not have been written to present an ‘objective’

history but with the purpose of transforming the readers/listeners ethically and emotionally by leading them to reflect upon past events (2004). As such, he questions the association of Sinhala nationalism with Buddhist *vamsa*:

Furthermore, the idea that the *vamsas* helped to legitimate the position of 'Buddhism' in the island represents a distinctively modern interpretation wherein people living in an era when the Buddhist religion has been defined as a discernible entity and contrasted with secular alternatives project their notions of Buddhism back into the past and conclude that the *vamsas* were engaged in promoting a 'religion'. Just how one can presume that premodern Buddhist devotees could conceive of a religion called 'Buddhism' that was conceptually distinct from other cultural institutions and practices, and thus a candidate for legitimation as the true religion of the Sinhalas, is usually left unexplained. To define the rhetoric of Buddhist histories as exclusively or even primarily concerned with religious and political legitimation portrays these works as tracts to shape the opinions of a pliable audience (whose relationships with these texts have not been established) for a purpose that scholars simply presume to have existed.

(Berkwitz 2004: 150–151)

Although Mahāyāna Buddhism once existed in Sri Lanka (see Rahula 1956: 85–111), I found that not all of my Sri Lankan informants were aware of it. The historical connection between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Sri Lanka seems to have little relevance to the issue of Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* transmission at the dawn of the twenty-first century. For the resistance against Mahāyāna influence in the *bhikkhunī* transmission was found among nearly all of my Sri Lankan informants, regardless of whether they supported the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order or not.

In addition, Mahāyāna Buddhism might be propagated as nothing more than witchcraft. For example, in a book about Buddhism in Sri Lanka, after introducing Mahāyāna teachings, the author goes on to say:

How greatly [Mahāyāna Buddhism] differed from the teaching of the Founder! The doctrine of salvation by faith instead of by works, the belief in supernatural beings, the reliance on image, ritual, and charms, and the abstruse metaphysical discussions, all these were fundamental departures from the life as lived, from the words as spoken by the Buddha Himself.<sup>52</sup>

If the statement above is the common perception of Sri Lankan Buddhists regarding Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is understandable that Sri Lankan nuns may come to see Mahāyāna Buddhism as inferior to Theravāda

Buddhism. Furthermore, according to Carter (1993), out of the Western influence of emphasizing religious texts and the Darwinian epitome of evolution during the European colonial period, Buddhists in Sri Lanka came to see Theravāda Buddhism as an early form of Buddhism, closer to the teachings of the Buddha. As such, Sri Lankan Buddhists might come to regard Theravāda Buddhism as superior to Mahāyāna Buddhism, since Mahāyāna Buddhism is believed to have developed later. If Sri Lankan Buddhists believe that Theravāda Buddhism is a more authentic form of Buddhism, it is understandable that they should see Mahāyāna influence in the transmission of the *bhikkhunī* order unacceptable.

### Summary

This section has shown the complicated reality of the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka. First, although the *bhikkhunī* ordination might bring empowerment to nuns who accept it, for nuns who refuse the *bhikkhunī* ordination, it may become a force of marginalization. Secondly, this section also shows that while opinions regarding the *bhikkhunī* ordination are very diverse in Sri Lanka, the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Mahāyāna tradition is generally unacceptable.

So far, the *bhikkhunī* movement in Sri Lanka has been a sectarian movement, for the legitimacy of the *bhikkhunī* status has not been accepted by all. The reason is that the *bhikkhunī* movement is generated not by the Sri Lankan Buddhist establishment but by feminists (e.g. Sakyadhita), Buddhists from abroad (e.g. Foguangshan) and *bhikkhu* who rebelled against traditional hierarchal confinement (e.g. *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala, see Abeysekara 1999). As such, the *bhikkhunī* movement thus far is relatively marginalized in Sri Lankan religious discourse and should be regarded as a sectarian movement.

To facilitate the legitimacy of the *bhikkhunī* status in the wider religious discourse in Sri Lanka, organizations that provide the *bhikkhunī* ordination have adopted various strategies. Foguangshan, for instance, always takes Theravāda sentiment into account at its higher ordination and stresses the *international* nature of its *bhikkhunī* ordination (Li 2000b). By so doing, the *bhikkhunī* ordination it provides might be more acceptable in Theravāda countries. Hema Goonatilake (2001: 9) also notes the strategies adopted by *bhikkhu* Inamaluwe Sumangala, who is associated with Dambulla *bhikkhunī* such as involving the laity in the *bhikkhunī* movement, organizing widely publicized receptions for the return of nuns who had gone for the *bhikkhunī* ordination, etc. for the purpose of raising the profile of the *bhikkhunī* order and making it more acceptable to the Sri Lankan public. More significant is that Buddhist feminists such as Hema Goonatilake (1988; 1996; 2001) and *bhikkhunī* Kusuma (i.e. Devendra 1987: 68–75) have adopted the strategy of textual discourse by referring to the records of the

*bhikkhunī* sangha in Sinhala chronicles (e.g. the *Dīpavaṃsa*) to claim a cultural heritage and thereby the legitimacy of *bhikkhunī* sangha in Sri Lanka. This strategy is similar to that of Siam Nikāya, which during the struggle for its installment in Sri Lanka, used textual discourse to claim not only legitimacy but also monastic orthodoxy. That is, until the establishment of the Siam Nikāya around the mid-1700s, Sri Lanka had neither *bhikkhu* nor *bhikkhunī* order. The Siam Nikāya, introduced from Thailand, might have initially been regarded as heterodox and sectarian but validated its authority by reference to its derivation from the Sri Lankan Mahāvihāra in the twelfth century as well as by claiming more ‘genuine’ renunciate practices, and managed to establish itself as a legitimate monastic order, and through the discourse of texts, represent itself as the orthodox monastic tradition (Blackburn 2003; 2001). Hence, it is possible that the weak movement, the *bhikkhunī* sangha, may one day become firmly established in Sri Lanka. Indeed, *bhikkhunī* Kusuma notices that not only is the Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* sangha beginning to take roots but it is also beginning to have influence on other Theravāda countries:

There are enough progressive monks in Sri Lanka to help the nuns to become fully ordained. There is no need that every monk in the country [agrees]. Recently, several nuns from Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam, and Nepal, became fully ordained in Sri Lanka and then returned to their countries.

(2004: 7)

## Chapter 5

# CONCLUSION

This research set out to examine issues deemed by Western feminists to be significant factors in the welfare of Buddhist nuns. However, the process of this research has led to the emergence of a far more complicated picture of the reality of Buddhist nuns than those issues that have been presupposed or implied by Western feminists to date. Even when the temporal framework is strictly limited (as in the time of my fieldwork), this research finds that the lives of Buddhist nuns could still diverge greatly from one another as a result of the variations in geographical, historical, political, economic, social, denominational, and other contexts. Therefore, the complexity of factors relevant to nuns' welfare requires both a reassessment of the feminist standpoint that inspired this research, and an ability to take into account a far greater range of generalities and specifics in making any such assessment of Buddhist nuns themselves. The themes present in this reassessment as well as my conclusions are outlined in this chapter.

I hope that by paying attention to (Sri Lankan and Taiwanese) Buddhist nuns' own perspectives, this research might challenge some Western academic impositions on the discourse of women in Buddhism, such as the absolutism of scriptural authority, the assumption that the beliefs and practices of all Buddhist nuns are identical, or the generalization of Buddhist women in Asia. Furthermore, the fieldwork findings reveal that many of my research subjects were strong, independent-minded women who were determined to pursue their goals. This thus challenges the common image of Asian women being weak and submissive.

Before assessing these issues in more detail in this concluding chapter, I will first acknowledge and discuss the shortcomings in this, my own research. For it too has its own limitations and there are, moreover, elements that in my opinion are worthy of investigation but, for one reason or another, have been omitted here. Having assessed the shortcomings of this thesis, and looked more fully at problems with pre-existing approaches, I shall then proceed to give a summary of my fieldwork findings and analyze the contribution the findings made to a better understanding of



Buddhist nuns' welfare. Finally, I will discuss the fieldwork findings in relation to the understanding of women in religion.

### Shortcomings

It is regretful that many factors, which may be related to Buddhist nuns' welfare, are omitted in this research, although in a sense such omission is in itself indicative of my claim that the factors are diverse and manifold, beyond encapsulation in a single formula. Nevertheless, in this section, I will mention a few of the more notable omitted factors and the reasons for their omission.

The first factor is class and urban/rural divisions. Class and urban/rural divisions undoubtedly influence women's relationship with religion. For instance, Seneviratne and Currie's (1994) study on Sri Lankan women finds that across religions, class appears to be a major factor in determining women's religious beliefs and practices. They show that middle-class women are more likely than women from a lower socio-economic class to refute the ideas regarding previous sin and menstrual pollution, and they also are more likely to participate in daily worship and religious activities. However, categorizing a renunciant's socio-economic class seems difficult. If I were to determine a nun's socio-economic class by her income, it would not reflect the reality of a nun who is adamant in keeping the Vinaya precepts of renouncing property and monetary dealings. If I were to ask a nun to identify her own class, it might be too subjective and cannot be used as a comparative basis. It would be better to determine a nun's class on the basis of her family background but, unfortunately, the limitation on the timeframe of this research would have made this investigation onerous. Given that Seneviratne and Currie (1994) had already conducted research regarding class influence on women's religion in Sri Lanka, and that class-consciousness is not strong in Taiwan, I chose not to derive into this factor but to pursue other issues.

As for urban/rural division, the omission is largely due to the ambiguity of the distinction. If I were to adopt Gombrich and Obeyesekere's definition that 'urban' refers to people who live an urban lifestyle, and who by aspiration and lifestyle are differentiated from 'peasants' (1988: 4), I must consider the fact that by the year 2000, only 5.4 percent of the female labor force in Taiwan belong to the agriculture sector.<sup>1</sup> On this basis, it seems that the majority of my Taiwanese nun samples, or their lay supporters, could not be categorized as 'peasants'. Indeed, it has been suggested to me that the entire urban-peasant distinction could be seen as a colonial superimposition of quasi-romantic notions of medieval European distinctions on to current Asia: one would never refer to present-day European or American farmers or farmworkers as peasants, and the concomitant presumed economic distinctions would also be completely misleading.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in

## CONCLUSION

accordance with the widespread Buddhist view that withdrawal from the bustle of society aids spiritual development, Taiwanese monastics tend to have an aspiration to leave urban areas for rural areas (Chiu 1997: 57–58) – which may also be the case in Sri Lanka, only I have not found literature on this topic – so it seems difficult to categorize nuns into an ‘urban and rural’ division. But the greatest difficulty of including urban/rural division in this research arises from the discrepancy in the situations of Taiwan and Sri Lanka. While only 21 percent of the total population lives in urban areas in Sri Lanka in 2003,<sup>3</sup> nearly 69 percent of the total population in Taiwan lives in great metropolitan areas.<sup>4</sup> In addition, population density is much higher in Taiwan than in Sri Lanka (Table 1), and the urban/rural difference might be less distinguishable in Taiwan than in Sri Lanka, making a comparative study of the rural/urban influence difficult. Given the difficulties for a comparative study and the fact that Bartholomeusz (1994) has investigated the urban/rural division in her research on Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns, I decided not to take on the urban/rural division as a separate issue.

Another factor omitted in this research is about Buddhist attitudes toward femininity. Femininity is an interesting and crucial issue in the study of women in religion, as Liz Wilson points out:

With the rise of the second wave of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a new feminist agenda emerged in Buddhist studies. Having been granted access to the public sphere, women in the sixties and seventies found themselves restricted by unstated assumptions and discriminatory ‘glass ceilings’. Recognizing that women can be granted full legal privileges and still be barred from enjoying them because of stereotypical assumptions about how women behave, the advocates of second-wave feminism set about changing society’s image of the feminine. Representations of women deemed exploitative and demeaning were exposed and their authors censured as a means of liberating women from the stereotypes that oppress them.

(1996: 7)

In other words, without a feminist representation of femininity, women could be oppressed/marginalized by the androcentric representations of women that restrict them from entering male-dominated areas. Hence, the representation of femininity is a crucial element in nuns’ welfare.

Many have studied the issue of femininity in Buddhist literature, such as Serinity Young (2004), Tsultrim Allione (2000), Liz Wilson (1996), Janice D. Willis (1987), Diana Paul (1979), etc. Rather interesting is that Mahāyāna and Theravāda texts have different approaches towards the representation of femininity. While Mahāyāna texts generally adopt an inclusive

approach towards both genders, Theravāda texts adopt the gender-pairing approach that gives women and men separate but equal spiritual paths (Skilling 2001: 241–254; Walters 1994). I also notice that Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Buddhism in Taiwan have different approaches toward femininity. In Sri Lanka, femininity is maintained and emphasized. Not only are nuns and monks deliberately distinguished in appearance (nuns wear long-sleeved blouses; monks bare one shoulder), but also when they sit down, they sit in different postures (nuns with their legs curved to one side; monks with their legs crossed). Nuns and monks are addressed differently, too. Nuns are addressed as ‘Māiyo’, and senior nuns bear the title ‘Therī’, while the monks are addressed as ‘Hamuduru’, and senior monks bear the title ‘Thera’. On the other hand, in Taiwan, the femininity of Buddhist nuns is suppressed. Their monastic robes do not look any different from the monks’, and they are encouraged to act like ‘great hero’ (*dazhangfu*), which, in Chinese, could literally mean to act in a masculine way. Additionally, both nuns and monks are addressed as ‘Master’ (*shifu*) and bear the title of ‘Dharma Master’ (*fashi*). These contrasting attitudes toward femininity are intriguing and deserve their own research study. Thus, I decided not to include femininity as a distinct topic in this research.

Perhaps the biggest distortion of this research, however, is not what I have omitted, but the partial silencing of my research subjects. My research subjects are partially silenced, not because they do not speak out in this research – after all, the whole purpose of conducting this research through the method of interview is to listen to Asian Buddhist nuns’ voices. My research subjects are partially silenced because I forced them to speak out about issues raised by Western feminists, rather than beginning with their own agenda. In truth, some of the issues in this research had already been the concerns of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese Buddhist nuns (e.g. education) even without the presence of Western feminist agitation. But in some cases the issues obviously had not occurred to them until their interviews with me: namely, the issues that are perceived to be too distant from the present (e.g. women’s karma and enlightenment) and deemed by the nuns as irrelevant to one’s present position in the spiritual path. It was for the purpose of comparative study and examining Western feminist critiques on Buddhism that I employed the research method as I did. But if I had not asked the questions first, what would the nuns have said? What issues would have they indicated as the issues that matter most in their lives? Nevertheless, their rejection of the significance of some of the issues in itself allowed the nuns to reassert their own values, and forced me to critique the Western academic feminist agenda and accept the priorities of my subjects. In this sense, therefore, the contact with the outsider (e.g. the contact with Western values) has helped to define the insiders’ values, enhancing their voice – recognizing all the while that it is we, the students of these traditions, and

academia, who are the audience benefiting from hearing their voice – and the value of these discussions to the insiders themselves is far less certain and harder to assess.

Also significant is that by basing my research on issues raised by Western feminism, this research runs the risk of what Mohanty calls ‘the naturalization of capitalist values’ (2003). Since I accept the issues raised by Western feminism as the basis for this research and I am myself from a capitalist country (Taiwan), I acknowledge that this research indeed echoes various capitalist values. One such issue is the presumption I began with that material comfort is a determining factor in the evaluation of a nun’s welfare, a point repeatedly showing up in my fieldwork. Given that the overall topic is Buddhism, a system that values renunciation of any material comforts that are in excess of basic necessities by the monastic, this is a particularly ambiguous criterion for assessing welfare. However, it is certainly impossible and perhaps arrogant to attempt to assess nuns’ welfare on the basis of ‘spiritual success’, even though the goal of Buddhism is ‘nirvāna’ rather than material comfort. Nevertheless, my research did undermine such presupposition by allowing the voices of the nuns’ thresholds to speak out, which did appear to be spiritual rather than material. Furthermore, in studying a cultural community one always has to negotiate the moral dilemmas regarding who has the right to speak out or on what basis the community should be evaluated. It is only on obtaining a better understanding of others that feminism across cultures might achieve better results (Jaggar 2000), and it is with this aim in mind that I have undertaken this research.

### *Summary of fieldwork findings*

When returning to the essential question of this research, ‘What factors influence the welfare of Buddhist nuns?’, the complex picture found in the fieldwork forestalls a straightforward, and simplistic conclusion. This very lack of a simple answer is in itself my overriding conclusion.

Chapter 1 outlines the theological and methodological standpoint of this research. It further points out that the purpose of this research is to achieve: (1) the recognition of transformation; (2) the demarginalization of Asian Buddhist nuns. With these two goals in mind, this research attempts to bring Asian Buddhist nuns’ voices into the discourse.

Chapter 2 reveals that the contexts of Buddhist nuns differ in Sri Lanka and Taiwan, and it discloses how the roles of Buddhism vary in Sri Lankan and Taiwanese contexts. Thus, from the very beginning, Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Taiwan situate in very different social, political and historical contexts. The analysis of fieldwork findings in Chapters 3 and 4 reveals further variances between the religious beliefs and practices of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese Buddhist nuns.

Chapter 3 deals with scriptural influence on gender-related concepts. Findings reveal that experience could be as influential as scriptural discourses. Whether it is the question of women's karma, women's ability to enlightenment, or the Eight Special Rules, findings of the fieldwork reveal that factors determining a nun's understandings and practices of these concepts vary greatly as the result of variations in the adoption of scriptures, doctrinal emphasis and personal experiences.

Chapter 4 first discusses the influence of nuns' age at renunciation and their reasons for renunciation. Generally speaking, Sri Lankan nuns enter nunhood at a younger age and out of spiritual reasons, and Taiwanese nuns enter nunhood at an older age and out of religious faith. The chapter then investigates the relationship between nuns' welfare and education. While nuns in both Sri Lanka and Taiwan overwhelmingly support the idea of education for Buddhist nuns, their educational experiences differ. Factors influencing the nuns' educational opportunities include the state's attitude towards Buddhist education and nuns' education, general economic context, and the attitude towards the monastics' involvement with economic activities. It is interesting to note a shared significant theme that emerged from the first two sections of the chapter. That is, the different degree of association with secular society of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese nuns. Not only are Taiwanese nuns more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to enter the monastic order at older age, to hold secular jobs prior to their ordination and to have more working experience, but also Taiwanese nuns are more likely than Sri Lankan nuns to have more training in secular education. It is thus safe to say that generally speaking, Taiwanese nuns are more familiar with secular affairs than Sri Lankan nuns. As noticed previously, this research as well as Western feminist critiques tend to assess Buddhist nuns' welfare on the basis of material comfort. Taiwanese nuns' familiarity with secular affairs might contribute to their better management of mundane matters and their material situation, which subsequently lead to a better material welfare and the image of a prosperous Taiwanese *bhikkhunī* order.

The third section in Chapter 4 focuses solely on the Taiwanese case, because it analyzes the feature of mixed-sex sangha, found commonly in contemporary Taiwan but non-existent in Sri Lanka. This section shows that the mixed-sex sangha is common and has had a long presence in Taiwan. Although it is uncontroversial for Taiwanese *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* to live at the same premises, celibacy (and a vegetarian diet) is expected of Taiwanese Buddhist monastics. This point is significant because it refutes the common misconception in Sri Lanka that clerical marriage is allowed in all Mahāyāna sects. Were sexual activities sanctioned to all Mahāyāna clergies it would make the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Mahāyāna tradition, such as from Taiwan, illegitimate. This section thus proves false the common argument in Sri Lanka that the *bhikkhunī* transmission from Mahāyāna tradition is illegitimate because clerical marriage is allowed in all

Mahāyāna sects. Moreover, even though the survey shows that nuns of the mixed-sex sangha enjoy seemingly better welfare than nuns of female-only sangha, and leadership at nearly all mixed-sex sangha remains in the hands of monks. Thus, the Taiwanese model of the mixed-sex sangha is still based on patriarchal arrangement.

The final section of Chapter 4 analyzes the *bhikkhunī* movement in contemporary Sri Lanka. It finds that the reasons for supporting or objecting to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order in Sri Lanka are multifarious and contradictory. Most significant is that the lack of cross-tradition communication and the Sri Lankan pride in the Theravāda tradition have led to a concern over Mahāyāna influence, which might become a basis for objection to the reestablishment of the *bhikkhunī* order. As for the relationship between the *bhikkhunī* status and nuns' welfare, I found a complicated and, to some extent, conflicting, picture. For while the *bhikkhunī* status could empower nuns by enabling them to claim the same monastic status and lay support as monks, the *bhikkhunī* movement may marginalize nuns who have not received or refuse to receive the *bhikkhunī* ordination. The findings in this section thus show that different religious actions lead to different personal experiences. This somewhat diverges from findings of previous sections, which show that different personal experiences lead to different religious beliefs and practices.

Overall, the fieldwork findings show that the diversity among Buddhist nuns' religious beliefs and practices can exist down to the individual level, and various denominational, linguistic, political, cultural, geographical, historical, etc. contexts constantly transform their religious understandings and actions. Throughout the analysis of the fieldwork findings, experience constantly emerges as an influential factor. Since (Buddhist) women are not homogenous and static, factors related to their welfare would vary across different contexts. Hence, it is by bringing women's experiences and the contexts behind their experiences into the discourse, that the understanding of women in religion might be more adequately achieved.

Indeed, the understanding of a religion itself is a complicated task, so much so that Ninian Smart (1996: 11) has suggested using a plethora of themes to understand religion, viewing it as a six-dimensional organism, typically containing doctrines, myths, ethical teachings, rituals, social institutions, and religious experiences. The studying of women in Buddhism in relation to all of the six dimensions seems to be impossible in a short research study like this, even though it is apparent that several of these dimensions are often at play in even a single question. The questions that I set out to investigate are mostly concerned with religion as social institutions (Chapter 4), although Chapter 3 deals with ethical teachings, and the research findings as a whole reveal the experiential dimension of religion.

Chapter 3 challenges the absolutism of scriptural authority, arguing that scripture is a subjective human activity, selected and read differently

throughout history. In as much as all my research subjects are Buddhist monastics, they differ not only in their acceptance of scriptural and tradition authority (Pāli scriptures vs. Chinese scriptures; Sinhala Theravāda vs. Han Chinese), but also in the orientations on the scriptural readings (e.g. the concept of 'dependent origination' vs. *bodhisattva* ideal). Consequently, their understandings of the religion vary. Adding too the influence of personal experiences, the variation widens.

In terms of religion as social institutions, it is sometimes assumed that Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' orders enjoy prosperity and empowerment. This is exemplified in Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* Ven. Kusuma's complaint in the *Sakyadhita* newsletter:

A senior monk once remarked that in Taiwan the *bhikkhunīs* have the upper hand, that there are fewer *bhikkhus* than *bhikkhunīs*, and for this reason the monk's *sasana* (propagation of the teachings) is declining there. Therefore, he concluded, the *bhikkhunīs* must not be supported!

(2004: 8)

The patriarchal resistance against the *bhikkhunī* movement in Sri Lanka is evident in the quotation above.

However, if gender relations within social institutions were to be defined in terms of rewards, prestige and power (Schlegel 1977: 3–9), it would appear that Buddhist institutions in neither Sri Lanka nor Taiwan enjoy gender egalitarianism. First, the term 'rewards' refers to the control of production and goods (Schlegel 1977: 6). In Buddhist sangha, it might be interpreted in terms of the allocation of lay donations, and here the inequality between nuns and monks is noticeable. In Sri Lanka, the lack of the *bhikkhunī* status (and the resistance to it) may lead the laity to consider the nuns' order a poorer 'merit field' to give their donations to, and the nuns in general are not rewarded with the same degree of state resources as the monks. In Taiwan, nuns might be deprived of the chance to lead some rituals and thus receive less lay donations. It is thus apparent that Buddhist nuns in neither country receive the same degree of 'rewards' as monks. The second criterion for assessing the gender relation in social institutions is 'prestige', which is to examine whether women are valued in their own right (Schlegel 1977: 7–8). It is not difficult to find claims, ideas and images that undermine women's prestige. For example, the claim of women's inferior karma, the widespread idea that women enter nunhood out of socio-economic concerns rather than spiritual/religious motivation, the image of nuns being ill-educated, etc. all undermine the nuns' orders and their prestige. Finally, the third criterion, 'power', is assessed by examining women's ability to control their own persons and activities (Schlegel 1977: 8–9). Although Buddhist monastic institutions for women usually function



entirely independently of male control (Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999a: 29), the difficulty for Sri Lankan Buddhist nuns to obtain education, and the male leadership in nearly all Taiwanese mixed-sex sangha testify that Buddhist nuns in neither Sri Lanka nor Taiwan are in an equal power-relation with the monks. Therefore, the warning and intended slight in the *Sakyadhita* newsletter that Taiwanese *bhikkhuni* have 'the upper hand' and are thereby causing the decline of the *bhikkhu* order seems to be far from the reality. In fact, the reverse might be true. For example, Chapter 4 notes that it is the Taiwanese laity's preference for monks that leads to a decline in the educational achievements of monks.

If women's welfare in religion as social institutions means the fair allocation of rewards, prestige and power, as discussed above, findings in this research reveal a sometimes-conflicting picture. It finds that in order to obtain a better share in the institution, factors such as the feminist readings of scriptures (Chapter 3), and a more secular-oriented nunhood, educational accessibility, egalitarian sangha management, and the equal status between nuns and monks and among nuns (all Chapter 4) are needed. While factors such as the feminist reading of scriptures and educational accessibility do not necessarily challenge the nuns' monastic aspect, the factors of secular-oriented nunhood and the means to create educational accessibility (e.g. fundraising or financial management for sangha education) are themselves a deviation from the very concept of renunciation. Adding to the likelihood that rather than a gender-egalitarian practice in Taiwanese Buddhism, the apparent prosperity of Taiwanese Buddhist nuns' order is fact due to the general economic affluence in Taiwan (Table 1) that leads to the nuns' order receiving abundant donations, it becomes even more difficult to draw a simple conclusion about which factors have significant effects on Buddhist nuns' welfare. As to be argued in the next section, I would suggest that bringing women's experiences and the contexts behind women's experiences into the discourse is one of the key aspects in the understanding of factors relating to Buddhist nuns' welfare, or the understanding of women in religion in general. That is, because there is a great diversity among women, women's empowerment might be better achieved in relation to their experiences and the contexts behind their experiences.

### Women's experiences

Across different fields in academia, there has been a growing trend to note the importance of experiences. It has been argued that taking women's experiences seriously as a valid vantage point is the fundamental tenet of feminism (Maynard 1994: 125). Not only might this have the benefit of leading to an androgynous discourse (e.g. Gross 1996: 65–104; Plaskow and Christ 1989), but also where a concrete action for transformation such as a development project is concerned, the inclusion of women's voices is crucial



for a desirable outcome (e.g. Marchand and Parpart 1995). Furthermore, many have also noted that women's experiences vary, and they do not speak monotonously (e.g. Donaldson 2002; Young 1999; Pierce 1996). Elements such as race, class, education, geographical location, sexual orientation, etc. all add further diversity into women's voices.

However, simply bringing women's experiences into the discourse is not enough. According to Chow Rey, because of 'the untranslatability of the native's experience' (1993: 38), the contexts behind an experience are also critical for an adequate discourse on women. That is, a person's experience could only be fully understood within the contexts where the experience occurs, and forgoing the contexts behind an experience leads to failure to understand the experience. Although Chow (1993) uses the term 'native' within the framework of postcolonial literary criticism, I am using the term 'native' in a broader sense here, to refer to any research subject whose background differs from that of the researcher. It means that in the patriarchal, imperialist, Orientalist or imperialist-feminist discourses, the 'natives', let them be women in the East, women in ancient texts, women from low socio-economic class, or simply women without access to academic language, become frozen in a muted imagistic frame, to be brutally gazed upon. They become subjected to whatever symbolism the onlooker imposes on them. The importance of taking the contexts behind an experience into account is perhaps well illustrated in Clare Walsh's (2001) study on women in previously male-dominated public spheres (e.g. female MPs, women priests in the Church of England). She finds that in contexts where the patriarchal mechanism remains, women may have to adopt strategies individually, sometimes including stereotyped femininity. Were the contexts where those women are situated not considered, their adoption of stereotyped feminine language and behavior, though capable of bringing changes, may not be recognized as achieving the feminist goal (Walsh 2001). It is also demonstrated in this research that Buddhist nuns' religious beliefs and practices are intrinsically interrelated with various political, social, denominational, cultural, geographical, etc. contexts in which the nuns are situated. The discourse on Buddhist nuns'/women's experiences thus cannot be taken in isolation – without reference to the various contexts behind their experiences.

Since taking the contexts behind experiences into a discourse is crucial, it raises the question about the study of religion based on texts: if one's experience is untranslatable outside the contexts of the experience, how can interpreters of ancient texts truly comprehend the messages in the texts that were written in distant temporal and spatial contexts? Of course, this is not to say that studying women in religion on a textual basis is not important. Works by Serinity Young (2004), Liz Wilson (1996), and Diana Paul (1979) that reexamined the feminine images in Buddhist texts are important for the construction of 'postpatriarchal Buddhism' (to borrow Rita Gross's

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(1993) phrase), because they deconstruct the androcentric representation of femininity in the scriptures. What I am trying to say is that once the various kinds of cultural, political, social, etc. contexts behind one's experience are curtailed, the experience might become untranslatable to whoever gazes upon it. Therefore, rather than pertaining to be a truer representation of the images/messages in the scriptures, it might be more appropriate to admit the intention or purpose behind the reading of the scriptures (e.g. reading for women in the twenty-first century). It has been argued that it is not the Buddhist nuns themselves but us, students of feminist/academic traditions, who benefit from the discourse on Buddhist nuns, because the direction and content of the discourse are often oriented and interpreted, not by nuns, but by us. I would therefore argue that the intention behind the discourse is as important as the discourse itself, for complete objectivity is impossible to achieve.

In other words, it might be necessary to pay attention to the influence of the researcher. In areas of anthropological and ethnographic studies, it has been argued that the researcher's backgrounds, positions and roles all have effects on the researched, which subsequently influence the outcome of the research (e.g. Wolf 1999; Knott 1995; Whitehead and Conaway 1986). Indeed, Makley (1997) notes that the representations of Tibetan women might be constructed by different agents (the Chinese, Western feminists, Tibetan nationalists) in different ways to suit their own agendas. Paying attention to the researcher is thus argued to be as essential as paying attention to the researched (e.g. Franzmann 2000: 22) in order to be wary and aware of the agendas and contexts influencing the very questions posed and their interpretation, even though a state of full objectivity, devoid of context, is recognized to be unachievable. Carol P. Christ (1997) further argues for a passionate, personal voice in academic writings, for since complete objectivity in research is impossible to achieve, the traditional usage of the impersonal voice in academic writings serves only to conceal the researcher's real agenda:

My conviction that theology begins in experience means that I, like many other feminist scholars, can no longer write in an impersonal voice. I believe that I must not only acknowledge and admit that my views are rooted in my life, but that I must also show how this is true. . . . Traditionally, theologians *mask*<sup>5</sup> the personal experiences that lead them to think as they do.

(Christ 1997: 36)

Personally, I have experienced what she has identified as 'theology begins in experience'. It happened one afternoon in Sri Lanka. I was standing under an arcade, watching and completely stunned by the pouring rain and

the glittering lightning, more fierce and terrifying than I had ever seen before. Suddenly, I realized why the Buddha set down the requirement for nuns and monks to conduct Rainy Season Retreat (*vassa*, usually conducted from June to October; for details, see Wijayaratna 1990: 19–22). Before that day, I had even wondered why the Buddha wanted his disciples to conduct retreat during the season when the climate was best suitable for traveling (the period from June to October is the best season for traveling in East Asia). It was only when I personally experienced the power of the South Asian monsoon that I could finally comprehend the meaning of *vassa*. Regardless of whether my understanding of *vassa* is accurate or not, my understanding of *vassa* is forever shaped by this experience, and therefore, ‘theology begins in experience’ (Christ 1997: 36). On the other hand, in the Vinaya, there is a completely different reason explicitly given for *vassa*, namely that lay people were worried about the damage that monastics wandering during the rainy season were doing to newly emerging plant life. Even with a textual authority, is my experience overturned? Or does the explicit reason itself reflect the tenor of the texts for the intended audience, leaving a more obvious reason unspoken? For the Vinaya rules tend to be attributed to two key motives: the spiritual benefit of the monastic practitioners, or the expectations and practical needs of the society supporting the monastic practitioners. Thus my experience gave me my understanding, which in turn leads me to question the information received from the textual authority. Even though I would generally accept the textual authority in its representation of the Buddha’s intentions, I would now pause and question, ‘Who wrote the text?’ ‘What was she/he like?’ ‘What is the intention behind the statement?’, etc. This is, therefore, what Carol Christ means by ‘theology begins in experience’ (1997: 36): my experience has led me to think the way I do.

Many feminists have noted the relationship between their experiences and their understanding of theology/religion, too. For example, Rita Gross recalls,

Suffice it to narrate that in September 1973, I was walking across the parking lot towards my office on the kind of unbearably beautiful fall day that makes living so far north so pleasurable, thinking about how to teach the Four Noble Truths, which I didn’t think I understood very well, in my upcoming Buddhism class. . . . So there I was, experiencing at one and the same time both intense misery at my own situation and intense appreciation for the beauty in which I was immersed. Clearly, by conventional standards, one of these experiences was ‘desirable’ and the other was ‘undesirable’, but their co-emergence rather than their contrast impressed itself upon me. Something suddenly snapped in my mind and I said to myself in wonder, ‘The Four Noble Truths are true!’.

(1998: 25)

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Therefore, women's experiences, the contexts behind women's experiences, and the researcher's own experiences are all interrelated and equally important in the discourse of religion.

In many ways, I consider myself lucky, because I belong to the generation after Nora opens the door. This metaphor comes from Henrik Ibsen's play, *A Doll's House*.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the play, the heroine, Nora, walks out of her comfortable but constraining home, leaving behind a bewildered husband. But her realization of the patriarchal constraints does not come easy, for it takes a crisis for her to realize it. On the other hand, by the time I started my postgraduate study, the second wave of feminism had been well established. I was able to read books such as *Women in Buddhism: images of the feminine in the Mahāyāna tradition* (Paul 1979), *Weaving the Visions: patterns in feminist spirituality* (edited by Plaskow and Christ 1989), *Women in Religion* (edited by Holm with Bowker 1994), *Religion and Gender* (edited by King 1995), and of course, *Buddhism After Patriarchy* (Gross 1993) and *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* (edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo 1999), the very two books that inspired this research. Very readily, there were a great deal of feminist resources to point out patriarchal constraints for me. By the time I started my postgraduate study, the door of the Doll's House had already opened, and all I needed to do was to walk out of the house.

Certainly, it should be easy to walk out of the house. But this seemingly simple step is not as easy as it may look, for Nora does not just leave behind a husband but also maids to do the housework. The realizing of patriarchal constraints is empowering, but being left behind is not. It has been noted that the experiences of working-class women, non-white women, lesbians, etc. are sometimes neglected in Western feminist discourse (e.g. Maynard 1994; Pierce 1996; Rich 1979). They are the maids being left behind by Nora. As much as I am privileged, Westernized, and a beneficiary of the second wave of feminism, there are times that I feel alienated by these feminist discourses. From time to time, I find that Western feminist works do not speak to my experiences as an Asian woman. It is out of this sense of alienation that I have undertaken this research, an attempt to bring the maids (in this case, Asian Buddhist nuns) into the center of the play. Surely, the maids must have stories of their own to tell.

But what happens after Nora walks out of the house? The play does not tell us. What the play does mention is the last things Nora says to her husband: she told him that in order for them to have a real marriage, both of them must transform. In other words, if the marriage is a metaphor for the gender relation, realizing the patriarchal constraints is not enough, opening the door is not enough, but walking out of the house and transforming oneself and the relation are needed. By transforming the patriarchal constraints and empowering women, a mutually benefiting gender relation may evolve. It is similar to the feminist search for spirituality:

Today, in feminism as elsewhere, spirituality is not an exclusive exploration of interiority and inwardness, but closely interwoven with all other dimensions of human experience, including social and political life. Thus spirituality is not a permanent retreat from the world into the monastery, the desert, the cave, or even the silence of one's own heart and mind, but arising out of the midst and depth of experience, spirituality implies the very point of entry into the fullness of life by bestowing meaning, value and direction to all human concerns.

(King 1989: 86)

Rita Gross also argues that a gender-balanced historical record of Buddhism is not enough, and there is a need to 'construct a vision of Buddhism after patriarchy, a Buddhism in accord with feminism as social vision' (1993: 298). Therefore, from a feminist perspective, transformation in social, relational terms is as important as the transformation of oneself. And I would argue that this transformation has two stages.

The first stage is the realization of patriarchal constraints, or using Ursula King's term, the descriptive dimension of women's new awareness and the negative-critical dimension of deconstructing the androcentric framework (1995a: 27). It is like Nora coming to a new awareness of the patriarchal constraints in her marriage and gradually deconstructing the androcentric framework. Though the play ends here, the transformation should not. Using Ursula King's term, the second stage of transformation takes place in the positive-critical dimension where women undertake the reconstruction of experiences, as well as in a methodological dimension where women seek to establish a new research methodological paradigm that involves personal concerns in relation to one's studies (1995a: 28).

I feel that as a member of the generation who emerged subsequent to the second wave of feminism, the second stage of transformation is especially vital. As mentioned earlier, I have benefited from the works of the second wave of feminism, for they have produced a great deal of work to deconstruct the androcentric framework in religion. Furthermore, for the maids who are left behind, feminist consciousness and the deconstruction of the androcentric framework are not enough: they need the actualization of empowerment in order to have the ability to walk out of the house. Hence, for me, the key point of the discourse on women in religion is the reconstruction of women's experiences, or, for Buddhist interest, the construction of a post-patriarchal Buddhism – to borrow Rita Gross's (1993) term.

Given the diversity among women's experiences that forestalls a straightforward, simplistic conclusion, it seems difficult to draw a common strategy for the struggle for all women. As such, Charlene Makley argues for 'relative empowerments' (1997: 4). That is, using the great diversity among Tibetan women as an example, Makley argues that the notion of 'absolute

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liberations', propagated by many Western feminists, should be reexamined and perhaps the empowerment of women should be sought in relation to the contexts of their experiences (1997). It is as in the play, *A Doll's House*, the empowerment of one woman (Nora) does not equal the empowerments of other women (the maids). And as Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* Kusuma's complaint in the *Sakyadhita* newsletter (2004: 8; quoted above) indicates, the prosperity of one Buddhist nuns' order (Taiwanese *bhikkhunī* sangha) does not necessarily benefit others. It is with the understanding of various women's experiences and the contexts behind their experiences that strategies might be developed in relation to the needs of each individual context.

It has been attested that religious symbols (ideology, myths, goddesses, etc.) and religious practices are interdependent (Sered 2000), and religious beliefs and practices are interrelated with experiences, which in turn are interrelated with the various contexts where the experiences occur. Because of this fluid composition of religion, a feminist transformation of religion is possible. The following Taiwanese nun's statement might provide a common ground for the struggle of Buddhist women:

In my opinion, [our] attitude has a fundamental difference from those gender issues. That is, we completely assert women's potential, and women's position in Buddhism and in society. Anything that disagrees with this principle should be considered as astray from Dharma. Because of this fundamental principle, we have no need to dispute over other issues.

(TN14, age 40, ordained for 12 years)

Therefore, because we can have, as a base, this principle of affirming women's equal spiritual potential and women's equal position in Buddhism and in society, a common ground for the struggle of women's empowerments might be developed. With this common ground in mind, strategies can be sought individually in relation to each context of women's experiences, and thus benefit the maximum number of women.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1 Source: *Taishō Tripitaka vols. 1–55 and 85*, Chinese Electronic Tripitaka Series, Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, CD-ROM edition (2002). My translation.
- 2 For more, see Ch'en Kenneth K.S. (1973), *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 3 Bode, Mabel (1893), 'The Women Leaders of the Buddhist Reformation (Abstract)', in Morgan, E. Delmar (ed.), *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 1, London: Committee of the Congress.
- 4 Foley, Caroline A. (1893), 'The Women Leaders of the Buddhist Reformation as Illustrated by Dhammapāla's Commentary on the Therī-gāthā', in Morgan, E. Delmar (ed.), *Transactions of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists*, vol. 1, London: Committee of the Congress.

## CHAPTER 2 BUDDHIST WOMEN IN SRI LANKA AND TAIWAN

- 1 *Pūjā* means worship, offering (Lamotte 1988: 835). According to Gombrich and Obeyesekere, the common form of *Bōdhi Pūjā* in Sri Lanka today was a reformed form of the traditional Buddhist ritual, Buddha *Pūjā*, which was revived by a monk named Pānadure Ariyadhamma in 1979. Because the revived form of Buddha *pūja* involves honoring the Bōdhi tree, this ritual comes to be known as '*Bōdhi Pūjā*' (1988: 384–410).
- 2 Sarvodaya, or 'Sarvodaya Shramadana', is a non-profit charity organization founded in Sri Lanka in 1958. It emphasizes a return to traditional village life based on Buddhist principles as the cure for the corruption and materialism of modern urban societies. For more, see Bond, George D. (2004), *Buddhism at Work: community development, social empowerment and Sarvodaya movement*, Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press. Alternatively, see the website of Sarvodaya, <http://www.sarvodaya.org>, accessed on 23 May 2005.
- 3 *Bodhgaya International Full Ordination Ceremony, 15–23 February 1998*, Taipei: Foguang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd, p. 3.
- 4 For more, see *Commemorative Magazine of Bodhgaya International Full Ordination Ceremony, 15–23 February 1998*, Taipei: Foguang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd.
- 5 Information in this section is gathered from an interview with *bhikkhunī* Kusuma. I am grateful to her for revising the first draft of this section.



- 6 I also met two other Sri Lankan *bhikkhunī* who received the higher ordination prior to 1996. However, probably due to the Mahāyāna nature of their ordination, their *bhikkhunī* status seems to be unrecognized by many.
- 7 Information and quotations of this subsection are from the interview.
- 8 Submitted to the Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, University of Jayawardenapura.
- 9 Referring to the phone call that she had just received prior to the conversation.
- 10 The average income per income receiver was Rs. 6,959 per month in 2002 (Source: *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2002*, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/poverty/HIES2002-DistrictLevel.pdf>, accessed in April 2004).
- 11 See 'Commencement of Buhikshuni Sasana for the second time in Sri Lanka and its present position', by *bhikkhunī* Kothmale Siri Sumedha, Secretary of the *Bhikkhunī* Training Center.
- 12 See *Commemorative Magazine of Bodhgaya: International Full Ordination Ceremony in 1998*, Taipei: Foguang Cultural Enterprise Co., Ltd.
- 13 Quoted from interview.
- 14 One of the major monastic lineages in Sri Lanka.
- 15 My nun informants told me that in their opinion, the remote location and lack of electricity at the Bhikkhunī Training Center was unsuitable for foreign women. But they were equally reluctant to destroy the forest for the purpose of constructing new buildings. Hence, separate premises for the Center's International Unit was needed.
- 16 For monastic members to sit at the same level as those with lower or no monastic status is unusual in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, monastics of senior status sit at a higher level than monastics of junior status and the laity.
- 17 In this book, I follow Charles Jones's example (1999) of choosing a romanization system for Chinese names by using the pinyin system as often as possible. Conventions include names that are well-known (e.g. Taipei instead of Taibei), authors who have published in English (e.g. Heng-Ching Shih instead of Hengqi Shi), or the English names used by an organization or person in their official websites or publications (e.g. Tzu-Chi instead of Ciji).
- 18 Source: *Census of Population and Housing 2001*, Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka.
- 19 For details, see Shepherd, John Robert (1993), *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier: 1600–1800*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- 20 For more on Patriarch Luo, see Seiwert 2003: 214–267.
- 21 The label of 'Taiwanese Buddhism' is to bring the focus of this research to the geographical dominion of Taiwan, even though the mainstream Buddhist discourse in contemporary Taiwan is of Han Chinese tradition.
- 22 For *bhikkhu* Yinshun's works, see <http://www.yinshun.org.tw>, accessed on 23 May 2005.
- 23 Source: *Foguang Da Cidian* (Foguang Dictionary), and Digital Museum of Buddhism in Taiwan: <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/index-people.html>, accessed on 23 May 2005.
- 24 'Zheng Yan' and 'Ciji' in the pinyin system.
- 25 '2001 Jiaoyu Tekan', *Tianxia Zazhi*, Taipei, 2001.
- 26 The female form of *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara* in the Chinese tradition.
- 27 Taiwan's GDP per capita in 1966 was \$9,487 NT. (source: Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, Executive Yuan, R.O.C.: <http://www.dgbas.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs4/table.xls#a224>, accessed on 23 May 2005).



- 28 Source: the official website of Tzu Chi: <http://www.tzuchi.org/global/about/index.html>, accessed on 23 May 2005.
- 29 I adopt the English translation of its title used on the website of *Xianguang sangha*, <http://www.gaya.org.tw>, accessed on 25 May 2005.
- 30 For more, see <http://www.gaya.org.tw>, accessed on 25 May 2005.
- 31 For details, see the electronic version of its English booklet: <http://www.gaya.org.tw/hkbi/introduction.htm>, accessed on 25 May 2005.
- 32 For details, see 'Fa' De Jianchi – XingGuang Ci 218 jingzuo kangyi jishi', *XingGuang ZhuangYan*, no. 49, March 1997.
- 33 Source: Foguangshan website: <http://www.fgs.org.tw>, accessed on 25 May 2005.
- 34 *Renjian Fojiao* is translated as 'Humanistic Buddhism' by Foguangshan, but I adopt Charles Jones's translation, 'Buddhism for the human realm', elsewhere in this book, for it denotes the meaning of *renjian fojiao* better.
- 35 'Xing Yun' in the pinyin system.
- 36 Source: Foguangshan website, <http://www.fgs.org.tw/main>, accessed on 25 May 2005.
- 37 Personal conversation with Dr Hema Goonatilake, 2002.
- 38 Personal email correspondence, 2002.

### CHAPTER 3 SCRIPTURE ANALYSIS

- 1 Official website: <http://www.ctworld.org.tw>, accessed on 26 May 2005.
- 2 For example, see Kawahashi, Noriko (1994), 'Review: Rita M. Gross, Buddhism after Patriarchy', *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 21: 445–449.
- 3 For more, see Skilton, Andrew (2000), 'The Letter of the Law and the Lore of Letters: the role of textual criticism in the transmission of Buddhist scripture', *Contemporary Buddhism: an interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 1 (no. 1), 9–34. Or, Lewis, Todd, T. (2000), *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: narratives and rituals of Newar Buddhism*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- 4 Considering that Buddhist canons were likely to be written by men rather than women, the amount of attention paid to female characters in the *Vimānavatthu* is striking.
- 5 Quoted from *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon, part IV*, translated by Horner I.B. and N.A. Jayawickrama (1974), London: The Pāli Text Society.
- 6 Quoted from *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon, part IV*, translated by German, H.S. (1974), London: The Pāli Text Society.
- 7 For details on *Jātaka* stories, see *The Jātaka or stories of the Buddha's former births*; Cowell E.B. (ed.); Francis, H.T.; R.A. Neil. W.H.D. Rouse (trans.) (1995), Oxford: The Pāli Text Society.
- 8 Quoted from *The Larger Sūtra on Amitāyus (The Sūtra on the Buddha of Infinite Life)* (1995), translated from the Chinese version of Samghavarman by Hisao, Inagaki, Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.
- 9 Source: *Chinese Taishō Tripitaka vols. 1–55 and 85*, Chinese Electronic Tripitaka Series, Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association. CD-ROM edition (2002).
- 10 Due to the small number of samples in the Taiwanese age groups '>61 years' and '<20 years', I disregard the findings from those age groups in this analysis.
- 11 For an English translation and commentary, see Obeyesekere, Ranjini (2001), *Portraits of Buddhist Women: stories from the Saddharmaratnāvaliya*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- 12 SN13, in Sinhala, age 42, ordained for 29 years.
- 13 For more on *bhikkhu* Yinshun, see Chapter 2.

- 14 See Crosby, Kate, 'Not Unless You Come Down From That Tree – ordination without parental consent in Theravāda Vinaya', *Buddhist Studies Review* (2006).
- 15 For more on ghost rituals, see Orzech, Charles (1996), 'Saving the Burning-Mouth Hungry Ghost', in Lopez, Donald S. Jr. (ed.), *Religions of China: in Practice*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 278–283.
- 16 Even though it is generally true that Buddhist nuns in Taiwan do not lead 'ghost rituals', there are expectations. *Bhikkhunī* Hong An of Miao Chong Si Temple in Southern Taiwan, for instance, claimed to lead 'ghost rituals' herself.
- 17 'Transforming Instead of Slaying the "Red Dragon"', by Sra. Yeshe Chokyi Lhamo.
- 18 For the story, see Crosby, Kate and Andrew Skilton (trans.) (1995), *Śāntideva: the Bodhicaryāvatāra* 4(20), Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- 19 For details on the story of Sanghamittā, see *Mahāvamsa*, English translation by Wilhelm Geiger (*The Mahāvamsa or the great chronicle of Ceylon*) (1912), London: The Pāli Text Society.
- 20 See *The Questions of King Milinda: an abridgement of the Milindapañha* (1993), Medis, N.K.G. (ed.), Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society.
- 21 Quoted from Walshe, Maurice (trans.) (1987), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: a translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 205–206.
- 22 *Changāhan Jing* T(01) in *Chinese Taishō Tripitaka vols. 1–55 and 85*, Chinese Electronic Tripitaka Series, Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, CD-ROM edition (2002).
- 23 For more, see Robinson, Richard H. (1967), *Early Madhyamaka in India and China*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- 24 Quote from *Bilingual Buddhist Series: sūtras and scriptures volume one* (1962), Kaohsiung, Taiwan: Buddhist Culture Service.
- 25 I am grateful to Prof. T.H. Barrett for proofreading my translation of this quotation. For an English translation of parts of the *sūtra*, see Cheng, Chen-huang (trans.) (2003), *The Sūtra of Mind Meditation in Mahāyāna Jātaka, Chapters 11, 12, 13*, New York: Eastern Buddhist Association.
- 26 Taixu's commentary, *Dasheng Bensheng Diguan Jing Jiangji*, New York: Eastern Buddhist Association (2002).
- 27 I did not catch the name.
- 28 Because it is clear that Sri Lankans believe women can attain *arahantship*, I see it unnecessary to count the Sri Lankan survey result about this question.
- 29 Quoted from *The Book of the Discipline: volume V (Cullavagga)*, translated by I.B. Horner (1952), London: Luzac & Co. Ltd.
- 30 While a *bhikkhunī* ordination requires the presence of both monk- and nun-preceptors, the *bhikkhu* ordination needs only monk-preceptors.
- 31 See 'SiBajinfā, Shi Zhaohui Lizheng Fomen Liangxing Pingquan', *China Times*, 01/04/2001.
- 32 See *Yuanshi Fojiao Shengdian Zhi Jisheng* by Yinshun Shih. In *Yinshun Fashi Foxue Zhuzuojī*, CD-ROM edition (2002), Hsinchu, Taiwan: Caituan Faren Yinshun Wenjiao Foundation (also available online: <http://www.yinshun.org.tw>, accessed on 26 May 2005).
- 33 For example, see the article by Jiang Canteng in *Xiangguang Zhongyen*, no. 68, December 2001.
- 34 Information from the Digital Museum of Buddhism in Taiwan, <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/index-people.html>, accessed on 30 May 2005.
- 35 Available on-line: <http://www.sanghamag.org>, accessed on 30 May 2005.
- 36 'The Eighty-four ugly gestures of women' is quoted from the *Daaidao Biquini Jing (Mahāprajāpti-bhikṣuṇī Sūtra)*, in which the Buddha is said to have

- described the eighty-four behaviors, said to be commonly found among women, that are obstacles to women's attaining nirvāna.
- 37 For more on *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui, see the website of Buddhist Hongshi College, the Buddhist college that she heads: <http://www.hongshi.org.tw>, accessed on 30 May 2005.
  - 38 The Dalai Lama visited Taiwan in April 2001. In the same article, *bhikkhuni* Zhaohui mentions that prior to the Dalai Lama's visit, she purposely wrote to a newspaper (published in *Ziyou Shibao*, 28 March 2001), publicly demanding that the Dalai Lama *abolish* the Eight Special Rules, in order to force him to deal with sexism in Buddhism.
  - 39 This is a common Chinese idiom expressing the widespread network of corruption.
  - 40 SN17, in English, age 83, ordained for 18 years.
  - 41 Quoted from *The Book of the Discipline: volume V (Cullavagga)*, translated by I.B. Horner (1952), London: Luzac & Co. Ltd.
  - 42 Underlining by me.
  - 43 Personal communication, April 2004. For the original Pāli statement, see *The Vinaya Pitakam: one of the principal Buddhist holy scriptures in the Pāli language (II)*, edited by Hermann Oldenberg, 1880.
  - 44 T22 (1425), Source: CD-ROM (2005), Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA), also available online: <http://www.cbeta.org/index.htm>, accessed on 16 June 2005.
  - 45 T22 (1428), *ibid*.
  - 46 *Ding Fubao Dictionary for Buddhist Studies*, *ibid*.
  - 47 P.290, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary: volume II*, by Franklin Edgerton (1953), 1985 edition, Delhi, Varanasi, Patna and Madras: Motilal Banarsidass.
  - 48 See the *Fayi Mingyiji* (T54 (2131)) in the *Taishō Tripitaka* (Source: CD-ROM (2005), Taipei: Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA)).
  - 49 For details on the mixed-sexes sangha in Taiwan, see Chapter 4.

#### CHAPTER 4 RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

- 1 Marriage is allowed for religious professions in the Sōtō sect, which Arai studies (1999).
- 2 *Anicca* (the impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (the absence of self) are the three characteristics or makers of all conditioned phenomena. See p. 309, Keown, Damien (2003), *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 3 Fieldwork note, 3 March 2002.
- 4 Fieldwork note, 18 March 2002.
- 5 This is a common idiom in Taiwan that is used to describe the helplessness of women in a married life.
- 6 In contemporary Taiwan, the traditional values that require a wife to be virtuous and obedient to her husband and his parents still prevail (Chang 1999).
- 7 The legal age of maturity in Taiwan is 21.
- 8 Fieldwork note, 21 February 2002.
- 9 See 'Religious Studies goes mainstream', 16 November 2000, *United Daily News*, <http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/20001116/20001116s5.html>, accessed on 4 June 2005.
- 10 <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/index.html>, accessed on 4 June 2005.
- 11 See <http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/formosa/index-org.html>, accessed on 4 June 2005.

- 12 Buddhist colleges within the Foguangshan system, which has both female-only and male-only colleges, are catalogued as one college in the list.
- 13 Official website: <http://www.fuyan.org.tw>, accessed on 4 June 2005.
- 14 See pp. 84–85, *Liangan foxue jiaoyu jiaoliu zuotanhui huiji bolanhui shi lu*. 1997. Zhonghua foxue yanjiusuo bianshen weiyuanhui bianshen (ed.), Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies.
- 15 The Digital Museum of Buddhism in Taiwan has a list of Buddhist colleges that are no longer functioning.
- 16 For details, see the Digital Museum of Buddhism in Taiwan.
- 17 In Chinese culture, a red envelope means that the cash inside is a gift.
- 18 SN5, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 36 years.
- 19 Fieldwork note, 22 April 2002.
- 20 Providing lodging for travelers is also a widespread practice at Buddhist temples in Taiwan.
- 21 Personal communication with Kate Crosby, 8 July 2004.
- 22 Fieldwork note, 23 March 2002.
- 23 Personal communication with Kate Crosby, 15 July 2004.
- 24 Based on the exchange rate of June 2004, \$2000 NT is approximately US\$59.20.
- 25 See Jaffe, Richard M. (2001), *Neither Monk Nor Layman: clerical marriage in modern Japanese Buddhism*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- 26 See Snellgrove, David L., 'The Schools of Tibetan Buddhism', in Kitagawa Joseph M. and Mark D. Cummings (eds), *Buddhism and Asian History*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 277–295.
- 27 See Gellner, David N. (1992), *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and its hierarchy of ritual*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 28 Yinshun, Shi, *Pingfan De Yisheng*, in *Yinshun Fashi Foxue Zhuuoji*, CD-ROM edition (2002), Hsinchu, Taiwan: Caituan Faren Yinshun Wenjiao Foundation.
- 29 Website: <http://www.ctworld.org.tw>, accessed on 7 June 2005.
- 30 Website: <http://www.ddm.org.tw>, accessed on 7 June 2005.
- 31 A common Chinese idiom.
- 32 Website: <http://fakuang.org.tw>, accessed on 7 June 7, 2005.
- 33 Personal conversation with the British nun, *bhikkhuni* Tenzin Palmo, 12 June 2005.
- 34 Fieldwork note, 29 March 2002. The *bhikkhu* spoke in Sinhala and his speech was translated into English by Mrs M.P. Amarasera for me. I am grateful for her help.
- 35 SN10, in Sinhala, in her 60s, ordained for 45 years.
- 36 SN4, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 30 years.
- 37 SN9, in Sinhala, age 32, ordained for 23 years.
- 38 SN16, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 19 years.
- 39 SN20, in Sinhala, age 38, ordained for 26 years.
- 40 SN1, in Sinhala, age 58, ordained for 36 years.
- 41 SN5, in Sinhala, age 49, ordained for 36 years.
- 42 For more on *bhikkhunī Vinaya*, see Kabilsingh, Chatsumarn (1984), *A Comparative Study of Bhikkhuni Pāṭimokkha*, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia. And Bhikkhunī Juo-Hsüeh Shih's *Controversies Over Buddhist Nuns* (2000, Oxford: The Pāli Text Society) also offers a good comparison between *bhikkhunī Vinaya* in Pāli and Chinese texts.
- 43 Personal conversation with Kate Crosby, 27 April 2004. For more, see François Bizot (1993), *Le Bouddhisme des Thaïs: brève histoire de ses mouvements et ses idées des origines à nos jours*, Bangkok: Éditions des Cahiers de France.
- 44 SN20, in Sinhala, age 38, ordained for 26 years.

## NOTES

- 45 SN25, in English, age 40, ordained for 10 years.
- 46 SN1, in Sinhala, age 58, ordained for 36 years.
- 47 SN19, in English, age 52. ordained for 10 years.
- 48 Fieldwork note, 29 April 2002.
- 49 TN2, age 53, ordained for 19 years.
- 50 Or better known to foreign tourists as 'Adam's Peak'.
- 51 For an English translation, see Geiger 1912: 267–271.
- 52 P. 578, *The Revolt in the Temple: composed to commemorate 2500 years of the land, the race and the faith* (1953), Colombo: Sinha Publications.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

- 1 Source: Directorate General of Budget and Accounting and Statistics: <http://www.dgbasey.gov.tw/dgbas03/bs2/Gender/Gender2.htm>, accessed in April 2004.
- 2 Personal conversation with Kate Crosby, 14 June 2004.
- 3 Source: United Nation, <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org>, accessed on 20 June 2005.
- 4 Source: Government Information Office, <http://www.gio.gov.tw>, accessed on 20 June 2005.
- 5 My emphasis.
- 6 Ibsen, Henrik (1965), 'A Doll's House', in Fjeld, Rolf (trans.) (1992 edition), *Ibsen: four major plays: volume I*, New York: Signet Classic, 42–114.

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